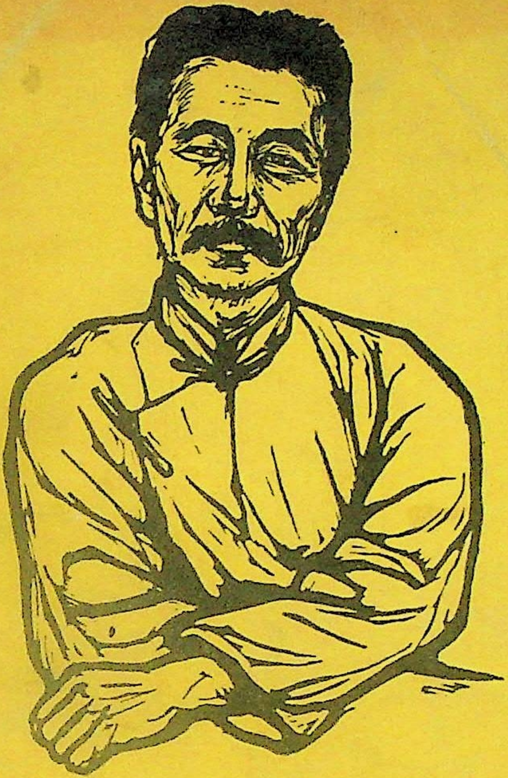

SELECTED STORIES OF LU HSUN

स्कैन्ड/Scanned

Lu Hsun

(This picture was taken in September, 1930, in Shanghai when the author was fifty years old.)

SELECTED STORIES OF LU HSUN

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This collection contains thirteen of Lu Hsun's short stories. *Call to Arms* is his earliest collection of stories, written between 1918 and 1922; *A Madman's Diary, Kung I-chi, Medicine, An Incident, Storm in a Teacup, My Old Home* and *Village Opera* all belong to this collection. *Wandering* is his second collection of short stories, written between 1924 and 1925, and here represented by *The New Year's Sacrifice, In the Wine Shop, The Misanthrope, A Happy Family* and *Regret for the Past.* The last story printed here, *Forging the Sword,* was written in October 1926; *Old Tales Retold,* the collection from which it comes, includes eight stories based on old myths and legends.

Lu Hsun was a great revolutionary democrat and a great communist, a genius shaped by the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people in modern times. A concise analysis of his work and a clear account of how he became a revolutionary democrat and developed into a communist can be found in Feng Hsueh-feng's article at the end of this book.

From the stories, written between 1918 and 1926, we can see clearly the characteristics of Lu Hsun's early works, the characteristics of a great revolutionary democrat and a master of realism.

A Madman's Diary, written in 1918, was Lu Hsun's first short story—a powerful accusation and attack on the feudal social system and conventions. "It was the first bugle call of the cultural revolution which was no other than a revolution in ideology." *Medicine,* written in April 1919, tells the story of a revolutionary hero, Hsia Yu, before the 1911 Revolution, and at the same time describes the ignorance and darkness of the old China before the masses had awoken. This tale, in spite of its deep gloom, prophesies the dawn of a new society, the awakening of the masses and their victorious future.

My Old Home and *The New Year's Sacrifice* are masterpieces describing the country-side and the peasants. An unforgettable picture is drawn of the bankrupt condition of the country-side in old China and the honest simplicity of the exploited peasants.

Kung I-chi is about a petty-bourgeois intellectual looked down on by others in the old society. Like Jun-tu in *My Old Home* and Hsiang-lin's wife in *The New Year's Sacrifice,* Kung I-chi is another unforgettable character.

In the Wine Shop and *The Misanthrope* both deal with intellectuals in the period after the 1911 Revolution who started life full of hope, only to lose heart because of the inherent drabness and squalor of their environment. These stories reveal both the cool realism of the author and his passionate indignation. "I walked with quickened steps, as if to break through some heavy barrier, but found it impossible. Something struggled in my ears and, after a long time, burst out. It was like a long howl, the howl of a wounded wolf crying in the wilderness in the depth of night, anger and sorrow mingled in its agony. . . ." This is how *The Misanthrope* ends, with a description of the story-teller's feeling after the funeral of his friend, a description not of hopeless grief but of a passionate protest. *In the Wine Shop* describes a life as grey and dull as the winter sky; but "several old plum trees were actually in full blossom in the snow, as if entirely oblivious to winter; while beside the crumbling pavilion there was still a camellia, with a dozen crimson blossoms standing out against its thick dark green foliage, blazing in the snow as bright as fire, indignant and arrogant. . . ." The fighting spirit in this description dispels the atmosphere of gloom in this story, lighting up the darkness.

A Happy Family and *Regret for the Past* describe how cruelly reality mocked the dreams of intellectuals. Although a vein of pathos and sentimentality runs through *Regret for the Past,* Lu Hsun's insight into the deep-rooted social causes of unhappiness under the old regime arouses the sympathy and indignation of the reader, and it is made clear that only when men and women have the courage to fight and destroy the fetters of the old society can the ideal of free love be realized.

An Incident tells how a rickshaw man helped an old woman who had fallen on the road, expressing the great selflessness of the working people which is seldom found among the petty bourgeoisie. Thus Lu Hsun writes in this story: "Suddenly I experienced a strange sensation. At that instant his dusty back seemed to grow larger, and the further he walked the larger he loomed, until I had to look up to him. At the same time he seemed gradually to be exerting a pressure on me, which threatened to overpower the small self under my fur-lined gown." Although only a short sketch, *An Incident* is very moving.

The last story, *Forging the Sword,* is based on a folk legend written over a thousand years ago. Lu Hsun uses this legend to express the determination and courage of the new generation in its fight against feudalism. At the time when he wrote this story, the First Revolutionary Civil War had just started in South China, and the warlords in North China were cruelly massacring students and citizens. With *Forging the Sword,* Lu Hsun called on common citizens and students alike to persist in their revolutionary struggle and revenge themselves on the reactionaries.

Lu Hsun said: "We Chinese, because we have never dared to face life, have had to resort to concealment and deceit. Hence arose our literature of concealment and deceit, and through such a literature we have sunk deeper and deeper into the morass of concealment and deceit, to an extent we fail to realize ourselves. The world is changing daily; it is high time for our writers to take off their masks, look life honestly, penetratingly and boldly in the face, and write of blood and flesh. We have long needed a totally new arena for literature, and some fierce fighters." These words may be applied to Lu Hsun's own work at that time and his attitude to writing. He was himself just such a "fierce fighter," who looked life boldly in the face. To tell the truth about life in a dark period, he wrote courageously about the horrors of his time. But he never believed that the darkness could not be conquered, and therefore always in his writings showed some ray of hope.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, "CALL TO ARMS"

When I was young I had many dreams. Most of them are now forgotten, but I see nothing in this to regret; for although recalling the past may bring pleasure, it may also make one lonely, and there is no point in dwelling on it. However, my trouble is that I cannot forget completely, and these stories have resulted from what I have been unable to forget.

For more than four years I used to go, almost daily, to a pawnbroker's and medicine shop. I cannot remember how old I was then; but the counter in the medicine shop was the same height as I, and that in the pawnbroker's twice my height. I used to hand clothes and trinkets up to the counter twice my height, take the money proffered with contempt, then go to the counter the same height as I to buy medicine for my father who was sick. On my return home I had other things to keep me busy, for since the physician who made out the prescriptions was very well-known, he used remarkable drugs: aloe root dug up in winter, sugar-cane that had been three years exposed to frost, twin crickets, and rare aromatic plants . . . for the most part very difficult to procure. But my father's illness went from bad to worse until he died.

I believe those who sink from prosperity to poverty come, in the process, to understand what the world is really like. I wanted to go to K— school in N—,* perhaps because I was in search of a change of scene and faces. There was nothing for my mother but to raise eight dollars for my travelling expenses, and say I might do as I pleased. That she cried was only natural, for at that time the proper thing was to study the classics and take the official examinations, and anyone studying so-called "foreign subjects" was thought to do so out of desperation, because forced to sell his soul to foreign devils; thus he would be all the more despised. My mother cried, too, because she would miss me. But in spite of that, I went to N— and entered K— school; and it was there that I learned the existence of such subjects as natural science, arithmetic, geography, history, drawing and physical training. They had no physiology course, but we saw copies of such works as *A New Course on the Human Body* and *Essays on Chemistry and Hygiene*. Recalling the talk and prescriptions of physicians I had known and comparing them with what I now knew, I came to the conclusion those physicians must be either unwitting or deliberate charlatans; and I began to sympathize with the invalids and families who suffered at their hands. From translated histories I also learned that the Japanese Reformation had originated, to a great extent, with the introduction of Western medical science to Japan.

These inklings took me to a provincial medical college in Japan. I dreamed that on my return to China I would cure patients like my father, who had been wrongly treated, while if war broke out I would serve as an army doctor, at the same time strengthening my countrymen's faith in reformation.

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* The Kiangnan Naval Academy in Nanking.

I do not know what advanced methods are now used to teach bacteriology, but at that time films were used to show the microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show films of natural scenery or newsreels to fill up the time. This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I would clap my hands and cheer at these scenes along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others of my countrymen stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because after this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and this was worse than dying of sickness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement. There were many Chinese students in Tokyo studying law, political science, physics and chemistry, even police work and industry, but not one studying literature or art. However, even in this uncongenial atmosphere I was fortunate enough to find some kindred spirits. We gathered the few others we needed, and decided of course our first step should be to publish a magazine, the title of which should denote that this was a new birth. As we were then rather classically inclined, we called it Hsin Sheng (New Life).

When the time for publication drew near, some of our contributors dropped out, and then our funds were withdrawn, until finally there were only three of us left, and we were penniless. We had started our magazine at an unlucky hour, so naturally we could not rail against fate; but later even we three were destined to part, and our discussions of a dream future had to cease. So ended this abortive "New Life."

Only later did I feel the futility of it all; at first I had taken all for granted. Later I felt if a man's proposals met with approval, it should encourage him; if they met with opposition, it should make him fight back; but the real tragedy was for him to lift up his voice among the living, and meet with no response, neither approval nor opposition, just as if he were in a boundless desert, with nothing to set his hand to. So I began to feel lonely.

And this feeling of loneliness grew day by day, coiling about my soul like a huge poisonous snake.

But in spite of my unaccountable sadness, I felt no indignation; for this experience had made me reflect and see that I was definitely not the heroic type who could rally multitudes at his call.

However, my loneliness had to be dispelled, for it was causing me agony. So I used various means to dull my senses, both by conforming to the spirit of the time and turning to the past. Later I experienced or witnessed even greater loneliness and sadness, which I do not like to recall, preferring that it should perish with me. Still my attempt to deaden my senses was not unsuccessful—I had lost the enthusiasm and fervour of my youth.

In S— Hostel there were three rooms where it was said a woman had lived who had hung herself on the locust tree in the courtyard. Now the tree had grown so tall that one could no longer reach its branches, but the rooms had remained vacant. For some years I stayed here, copying ancient inscriptions. I had few visitors, there were no political problems or issues in those inscriptions, and my only desire was that my life should slip quietly away like this. On summer nights, when there were too many mosquitoes, I would sit under the locust tree, waving my fan and looking at the specks of sky through the thick leaves, while the caterpillars which came out in the evening would fall, icy-cold, on my neck.

The only visitor to come for an occasional talk was my old friend Ching Hsing-yi. He would put his big portfolio down on the broken table, take off his long gown, and sit facing me, looking as if his heart was still beating fast after braving the dogs.

"What is the use of copying these?" he demanded one night, after looking through the inscriptions I had copied and considering the matter.

"No use at all."

"Then why copy them?"

"For no particular reason."

"I think, you might write something. . . ."

I understood. They were editing the magazine "New Youth," but hitherto there seemed to have been no reaction, favourable or otherwise, and I guessed they must be feeling lonely. However I said:

"Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of asphyxiation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel any pain. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the misery of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?"

"If some awake, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house."

True, in spite of my own conviction, I could not say there was no hope, for hope lies in the future. I could not use my own evidence to refute his assertion that it might exist. So I agreed to write, and the result was my first story *A Madman's Diary*. From that time onwards, I could not stop writing, and would write some sort of short story from time to time at the request of friends, until I had more than a dozen of them.

As for myself, I no longer feel any great urge to express myself; yet, perhaps because I have not entirely forgotten the grief of my past loneliness, I sometimes call out, to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart. Whether my cry is brave or sad, repellent or ridiculous, I do not care. However, since it is a call to arms, I naturally have to obey my general's orders; and this is why I do not always stick to the truth, as when I made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son's grave in *Medicine*, while in *Tomorrow* I did not say whether the mother dreamed of her son or not. For our chiefs then were against pessimism. And I, for my part, did not want to infect with the loneliness I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when young.

It is clear, then, that my short stories fall far short of being works of art; hence I count myself fortunate that they are still known as stories, and are even being compiled in one book. Although such good fortune makes me uneasy, I am nevertheless pleased to think they have readers, for the time being at least.

Since these short stories of mine are being reprinted in one collection, owing to the reasons given above, I have chosen the title "Na Han" (Call to Arms).

December 3, 1922, Peking

A MADMAN'S DIARY

TWO brothers, whose names I need not mention here, were both good friends of mine in school; but after a separation of many years we lost touch. Some time ago I happened to hear that one of them was seriously ill, and since I was going back to my old home I broke my journey to call on them. I saw only one of them, however, who told me that the invalid was his younger brother.

"I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us," he said, "but he recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." Then, laughing, he produced two volumes of his brother's diary, saying that from these the nature of his past illness could be seen, for there was no harm in showing them to a friend. I took the diary away and read it through, and found that he had suffered from a form of persecution complex. The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements; moreover he had omitted to give any dates, so that only by the colour of the ink and the differences in the writing could one tell that it was not written at one time. Certain sections, however, were not altogether disconnected, and I have copied out a part to serve as a subject for medical research. I have not changed a single word in the diary except for the names, even though the people referred to are all obscure country folk, unknown to the world. As for the title, it was chosen by the diarist himself after his recovery, and I did not change it.

Tonight the moon is very bright.

I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty odd years I have been in the dark; but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should that dog in the Chao family have looked at me twice?

I have reason for my fear.

Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that is unlucky. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Chao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were also seven or eight others, who had their heads together discussing me. And they were afraid of my seeing them. All the people I passed were like that. The fiercest among them bared his teeth in a smile; whereupon I shivered from head to foot, knowing that their preparations were complete.

I was not afraid, however, but continued on my way. A group of children in front were also discussing me, and the look in their eyes was just like that in Mr. Chao's, while their faces too were ghastly pale. I wondered what quarrel I could have with these children, to make them behave like this. I could not help calling out: "Tell me!" But then they ran away.

I wonder what quarrel I can have with Mr. Chao, what quarrel I can have with the people on the road. I can think of nothing except that twenty years ago

I trod on Mr. Ku Chiu's account sheets and Mr. Ku was very displeased. Although Mr. Chao does not know him, he must have heard talk of this and decided to avenge him, so he is conspiring with the people on the road against me. But then what of the children? At that time they were not yet born, so why should they have eyed me so strangely today, as if they were afraid of me, as if they wanted to murder me? This really frightens me, it is so bewildering and upsetting.

I know. They must have learnt this from their parents!

I can't sleep at night. Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it.

Those people—some of them have been pilloried by the magistrate, some slapped in the face by the local gentry, some have had their wives taken away by bailiffs, some have had their parents driven to suicide by creditors; yet they never looked as frightened and as fierce then as they did yesterday.

The most extraordinary thing was that woman on the street yesterday who was spanking her son and saying, "Little devil! I'd like to bite several mouthfuls out of you to work off my feelings!" Yet all the time she was looking at me. I gave a start, unable to control myself; then all those pale-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh derisively. Old Chen hurried forward and insisted on taking me home.

He took me home. The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as all the others. When I went into the study, they locked the door outside as if cooping up a chicken or a duck. This incident left me even more bewildered.

A few days ago a tenant of ours from Wolf Cub Village came to speak about the crops, and told my elder brother that a notorious character in their village had been beaten to death by everyone there; then some people had taken out his heart, fried it in oil and eaten it, as a means of increasing their courage. When I interrupted, the tenant and my brother both stared at me. Only today have I realized that they had exactly the same look in their eyes as those people outside.

Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet.

They eat human beings, so what is to stop them from eating me?

I see that woman's "bite several mouthfuls out of you," the laughter of those pale-faced, long-toothed people and the tenant's story the other day are obviously secret signs. I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening, used for eating human beings.

It seems to me, although I am not a bad man, ever since I trod on Mr. Ku's accounts I have been suspected. They seem to have secrets which I cannot guess, and once they are angry they will call anyone a bad character. I remember when my elder brother taught me to write compositions, no matter how good a man was, if I produced arguments to the contrary he would mark that passage to show approval; while if I excused evil-doers, he would say: "Good for you, that shows originality." How can I possibly guess their secret thoughts—especially when it comes to the time for eating?

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology, and each page bears the words: "Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read carefully half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words—"Eat people."

All these words written in the book, all the words spoken by our tenant, gaze at me strangely with an enigmatic smile.

I too am a man, and they want to eat me!

In the morning I sat quietly for some time. Old Chen brought lunch in: one bowl of vegetables, one bowl of steamed fish. The eyes of the fish were white and hard, and its mouth was open just like those people who want to eat human beings. After a few mouthfuls I could not tell whether the slippery morsels were fish or human flesh, so I brought it all up.

I said, "Old Chen, tell my brother that I am feeling quite suffocated, and want to have a stroll in the courtyard." Old Chen said nothing but went out, and presently he came back and opened the gate.

I did not move, watching to see how they would treat me, knowing that they certainly would not let me go. Sure enough! My elder brother came slowly out, leading an old man. There was a murderous gleam in his eyes, and fearing that I would see it he lowered his head, stealing glances at me from the side of his spectacles.

"You seem to be very well today," said my brother.

"Yes," said I.

"I have invited Mr. Ho here today," said my brother, "to examine you."

"All right," said I. But actually I know quite well that this old man was the executioner in disguise! He was simply using the pretext of feeling my pulse to see how fat I was; for by so doing he would be given a share of my flesh. Still I was not afraid. Although I do not eat men, I am braver than they. I held out my two fists, watching what he would do. The old man sat down, closed his eyes, fumbled for some time and remained still for some time; then he opened his shifty eyes and said, "Don't let your imagination run away with you. Rest quietly for a few days, and you will be all right."

Don't let your imagination run away with you! Rest quietly for a few days! When I have grown fat, naturally they will have more to eat; but what good will it do me, or how can it be "all right"? All these people wanting to eat human flesh and at the same time stealthily trying to keep up appearances, not daring to act promptly, really made me nearly die of laughter. I could not help roaring with laughter, I felt so amused. I knew that in this laughter were courage and integrity. Both the old man and my brother turned pale, awed by my courage and integrity.

But just because I am brave they are the more eager to eat me, in order to acquire some of my courage. The old man went out of the gate, but before he had gone far he said to my brother in a low voice, "To be eaten at once!" And my brother nodded. So you are in it too! This stupendous discovery, although it came as a shock, is yet no more than I had expected: the accomplice in eating me is my elder brother!

The eater of human flesh is my elder brother!

I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

I myself will be eaten by others, but none the less I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

These few days I have been thinking back: suppose that old man were not an executioner in disguise, but a real doctor; he would be none the less an eater of human flesh. In that book on herbs, written by his predecessor Li Shih-chen, it is clearly stated that men's flesh can be fried and eaten; so can he still say that he does not eat men?

As for my elder brother, it is also impossible to exonerate him. When he was teaching me, he said with his own lips, "People exchange their sons to eat."* And once, in discussing a bad man, he said that not only did he deserve to be killed, he should "have his flesh eaten and his hide slept on."* I was still young then, and my heart beat faster for some time. And the story about eating a man's heart and liver that our tenant from Wolf Cub Village told us the other day, he did not consider at all strange but kept nodding his head. It is evident that his outlook is unchanged. Since it is possible to "exchange sons to eat," then anything can be exchanged, anyone can be eaten. In the past I simply listened to his explanations, and let it go at that; now I know that when he was explaining to me, not only was there human oil at the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men.

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* These are quotations from Chinese classics.

Pitch black. I don't know whether it is day or night. The Chao family dog has started barking again.

The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the craftiness of a fox. . . .

I know their way; they are not willing to kill anyone outright, for fear of the consequences. So they have all banded together and set traps, to force me to kill myself. Just look at the behaviour of the men and women in the street a few days ago, and my elder brother's attitude these last few days, it is quite obvious. What they like best is for a man to take off his belt, and hang himself from a rafter; for then they are not blamed for murder, and can enjoy their heart's desire. Naturally that sets them roaring with delighted laughter. On the other hand, if a man is frightened or worried to death, although that makes him rather thin, they are still willing to eat him.

They will only eat dead flesh! I remember reading somewhere of a hideous beast, with an ugly look in its eye, called "hyena" which only eats dead flesh. Even the largest bones it grinds into fragments and swallows: the mere thought of this is enough to terrify one. Hyenas are related to wolves, and wolves belong to the canine species. The other day the dog in the Chao family looked at me several times; obviously it is in the plot too and has become their accomplice. The old man's eyes were cast down, but how could that deceive me!

The most deplorable is my elder brother. He is also a man, so why is he not afraid, why is he plotting with others to eat me? Is it that when there is sufficient historical precedent it is not considered as a crime? Or is it that he has hardened his heart to do something he knows is wrong?

He shall be the first man-eater I condemn, the first I start to dissuade.

Actually, such arguments should have been acknowledged long ago. . . .

Suddenly someone came in. He was only about twenty years old and I did not see his features very clearly. His face was wreathed in smiles, and when he nodded to me his smile did not seem genuine. Then I asked him: "Is it right to eat human beings?"

Still smiling, he replied, "When there is no famine how can one eat human beings?"

I realized at once, he was one of them; but I summoned up courage to repeat my question:

"Is it right?"

"What makes you ask such a thing? You really are . . . fond of a joke. . . . It is very fine today."

"It is fine, and the moon is very bright. But I want to ask you: Is it right?"

He looked disconcerted, and muttered: "No. . . ."

"No? Then why do they still do it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? They are eating men now in Wolf Cub Village, and you can see it written all over the books, in fresh red ink."

His expression changed, and he grew ghastly pale. "It may be so," he said, staring at me. "It has always been like that. . . ."

"Is it right because it has always been like that?"

"I refuse to discuss these things with you. Anyway you shouldn't talk about it. To talk about it is wrong!"

I leapt up and opened my eyes wide, but the man had vanished. I was soaked with perspiration. He was much younger than my elder brother, but even so he was in it. He must have been taught by his parents. And I am afraid he has already taught his son: that is why even the children look at me so fiercely.

Wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all look at each other with the deepest suspicion. . . .

If they could only get rid of this obsession, they could go to work, walk, eat and sleep free from anxiety, very comfortably. They have only this one step to take. And yet fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends, teachers and students, sworn enemies and even strangers, have all joined in this conspiracy, encouraging and implicating each other. And not for anything will they change their stand.

Early this morning I went to look for my elder brother. He was standing outside the hall door looking at the sky, when I walked up behind him, barred the door, and with exceptional poise and politeness said to him:

"Brother, I have something to say to you."

"Well, what is it?" said he, quickly turning towards me and nodding.

"It is very little, but I find it difficult to say. Brother, probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their outlook changed, some of them stopped, and because they tried to be good they changed into men, changed into real men. But some are still eating. Just like reptiles: some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys and finally men; but some do not try to be good, and remain reptiles still. When those who eat men compare themselves with those who do not eat men, how ashamed they must be. Probably much more ashamed than the reptiles before the monkeys.

"In ancient times a cook boiled his son for a tyrant to eat; that is the old story. But actually since the creation of heaven and earth men have been eating each other, down to the time of that cook, continuing to the time of the Revolution, and from the time of the Revolution to the case of the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it.

"They want to eat me, and of course you can do nothing about it single-handed; but why should you join them? As man-eaters they are capable of anything. If they eat me, they can eat you; members of the same group can still eat each other. But if you will just change your ways immediately, then everyone will have peace. Although this has been going on since time immemorial, today we could be particularly kind to each other. You say it is impossible, brother, but I think it is possible. The other day when the tenant wanted the rent reduced, you said it was impossible."

At first he only smiled cynically, then a murderous gleam came into his eyes, and when I spoke of their secret his face turned pale. Outside the gate stood a group of people, including Mr. Chao and his dog, all craning their necks to peer in. I could not see all their faces, for they seemed to be wrapped up in cloths; some of them looked pale and ghastly still, concealing their laughter. I knew they were one band, all eaters of human flesh. But I also knew that they did not all think alike by any means. Some of them thought that since it had always been so, men should be eaten. Some of them knew that they should not eat men, but still wanted to; and they were afraid people might discover their secret; thus when they heard me they became angry, but they still smiled their cynical, tight-lipped smile.

Suddenly my brother looked furious, and shouted in a loud voice:

"Get out of here, all of you! What is the point of looking at a madman?"

Then I realized part of their cunning. They would never be willing to change their stand, and their plans were all laid; they had prepared the name of madman for me. In future when I was eaten, not only would there be no trouble, but people would probably be grateful to them. When our tenant spoke of the villagers eating a bad character, it was exactly the same device. This is their old trick.

Old Chen came in too, in a great temper, but they could not stop my mouth, I had to speak to those people:

"You should change, change from the bottom of your hearts!" I said. "You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world.

"If you don't change, you may be eaten yourselves. Although so many are born, they will be wiped out by the real men, just like wolves killed by the hunters. Just like reptiles!"

Old Chen drove everybody away. My brother had disappeared. Old Chen advised me to go back to my room. The room was pitch black. The beams and rafters shook above my head. After shaking for some time they grew larger. They piled on top of me.

The weight was so great, I could not move. They meant that I should die. I knew that the weight was false, so I struggled out, covered in perspiration. But I had to say:

"You should change at once, change from the bottom of your hearts! You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world. . . ."

The sun does not shine, the door is not opened, every day two meals.

I took up my chopsticks, then thought of my elder brother; I know now how my little sister died: it was all through him. My sister was only five at the time, sweet and lovable, I can still see her in my mind's eye. Mother cried and cried, but he begged her not to cry, probably because he had eaten her himself, and so crying made him feel ashamed—that is, if he had any sense of shame.

My sister was eaten by my brother, but I don't know whether Mother realized it or not.

I think Mother must have known, but when she was crying she did not say so outright, probably because she thought it proper. I remember when I was four or five years old, sitting in the cool in front of the hall, my brother told me that if a man's parents were ill he should cut off a piece of his flesh and boil it for them, if he wanted to be considered a good son; and Mother did not contradict him. If one piece could be eaten, obviously so could the whole. And yet just to think of the mourning then still makes my heart bleed; that is the extraordinary thing about it!

I can't bear to think of it.

I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh. My brother had just taken over the charge of the house when our sister died, and he may well have used her flesh in our rice and dishes, making us eat it unwittingly.

It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn. . . .

How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history—even though I knew nothing about it at first—ever hope to face real men?

Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten men?

Save the children. . . .

April 1918

KUNG I-CHI

THE wine shops in Luchen are not like those in other parts of China. They all have a right-angled counter facing the street, where hot water is kept on tap for warming wine. When men come off work at midday and in the evening they buy a bowl of wine; it cost four cash twenty years ago, but now it costs ten. Standing beside the counter, they drink it warm, and relax. Another cash will buy a plate of salted bamboo shoots or spiced beans, to accompany the wine; while for a dozen cash you can buy a meat dish. But most of these customers belong to the short-coated class, few of whom have much money to spare. Only those in long gowns enter the adjacent room to order wine and dishes, and sit and drink at leisure.

At the age of twelve I started work as a waiter in Hsien Heng Tavern, at the entrance to the town. The tavern keeper said I looked too foolish to serve the long-gowned customers, so I was given work in the outer room. Although the short-coated customers there were more easily pleased, there were quite a few trouble-makers among them too. They would insist on watching with their own eyes as the yellow wine was ladled from the keg, looking to see if there were any water at the bottom of the wine pot, and inspecting for themselves the immersion of the pot in hot water. Under such keen scrutiny, it was very difficult to dilute the wine. So after a few days my employer decided I was not suited for this work. Fortunately I had been recommended by someone influential, so he could not dismiss me, and I was transferred to the dull work of warming wine.

Thenceforward I stood all day behind the counter, fully engaged with my duties. Although I gave satisfaction at this work, I found it monotonous and futile. Our employer was a fierce-looking individual, and the customers were a morose lot, so that it was impossible to be gay. Only when Kung I-chi came to the tavern was any laughter heard. That is why I still remember him.

Kung was the only long-gowned customer to drink his wine standing. He was a big man, strangely pallid, and scars often showed among the wrinkles of his face. He had a large, unkempt beard, streaked with white. Although he wore a long gown, it was dirty and tattered, and looked as if it had not been washed or mended for over ten years. He used so many archaisms in his speech, it was impossible to understand half he said. Whenever he came into the shop, everyone would look at him and chuckle. And someone would call out:

"Kung I-chi! There are some fresh scars on your face!"

Ignoring this remark, Kung would come to the counter to order two bowls of heated wine and a dish of spiced beans. And he would produce nine cash. Someone else would then call out, in deliberately loud tones:

"You must have been stealing again!"

"Why spoil a man's good name groundlessly?" he would ask, opening his eyes wide.

"What good name? Day before yesterday I saw you with my own eyes being hung up and beaten for stealing books from the Ho family!"

Then Kung would flush, the veins on his forehead standing out, as he remonstrated: "Taking a book can't be considered stealing. . . . Taking a book, the affair of a scholar, can't be considered stealing!" Then followed quotations from the classics, like "The perfect man is content with poverty," and a jumble of archaic expressions till everybody was roaring with laughter and the whole tavern was gay.

From gossip I heard, Kung I-chi had studied the classics but had never passed the official examination, and had no way of making a living; so he grew poorer and poorer, until he was practically reduced to beggary. Happily, he was a good calligrapher, and could get enough copying work to support himself. Unfortunately he had failings: he liked drinking and was lazy. So after a few days he would invariably disappear, taking books, paper, brushes and inkstone with him. And after this had happened several times, nobody wanted to employ him as a copyist again. Then there was no help for him but to take to pilfering. In our tavern his behaviour was exemplary. He never failed to pay his debts, although sometimes, when he had no ready money, his name would appear on the board where we listed debtors. However, in less than a month he would always settle, and his name would be wiped off the board again.

After drinking half a bowl of wine, Kung would regain his composure. But then someone would ask:

"Kung I-chi, do you really know how to read?"

When Kung looked as if such a question were beneath contempt, they would continue: "How is it you never passed even the lowest official examination?"

At that Kung would look disconsolate and ill at ease. His face would turn pale and his lips move, but only to utter those unintelligible classical expressions. Then everybody would laugh heartily again, and the whole tavern would be merry.

At such times, I could join in the laughter without being scolded by my master. In fact he put such questions to Kung himself, to evoke laughter. Knowing it was no use talking to them, Kung would chat to us children. Once he asked me:

"Have you had any schooling?"

When I nodded, he said, "Well then, I'll test you. How do you write the character 'hui' in 'hui-hsiang' (a kind of spice—Translator) beans?"

I thought, "I'm not going to be tested by a beggar!" So I turned away and ignored him. After waiting for some time, he said very earnestly:

"You can't write it? I'll show you how. Mind you remember! You ought to remember such characters, because later when you have a shop of your own, you'll need to use them."

It seemed to me I was still very far from owning a shop; besides, our employer never entered "hui-hsiang" beans in the account book. Amused yet exasperated, I answered listlessly: "Who wants you to teach? Isn't it the character 'hui' with the grass radical?"

Kung was delighted, and tapped two long fingernails on the counter. "Right, right!" he said, nodding. "Only there are four different ways of writing 'hui.' Do you know them?" My patience exhausted, I scowled and made off. Kung I-chi had dipped his finger in wine, in order to trace the characters on the counter; but when he saw how indifferent I was, he sighed, and a hurt look came into his eyes.

Sometimes children in the neighbourhood, hearing laughter, came to join the fun, and surrounded Kung I-chi. Then he would give them spiced beans, one apiece. After eating the beans, the children would still hang round, their eyes on the dish. Flustered, he would cover the dish with his hand and, bending forward from the waist, would say: "There isn't much. I haven't much as it is." Then straightening up to look at the beans again, he would shake his head. "Not much! Verily, not much, forsooth!" Then the children would scamper off, with shouts of laughter.

So amusing was Kung I-chi. However, without him we got along all right too.

One day, a few days before the Mid-Autumn Festival, the tavern keeper was laboriously making out his accounts. Suddenly, putting down his slate, he said: "Kung I-chi hasn't been in for a long time. He still owes nineteen cash!" That made me realize how long it was since we had seen him.

"How could he come?" one of the customers said. "His legs were broken in that last beating."

"Ah!"

"He was stealing again. This time he was fool enough to steal from Mr. Ting, the provincial scholar! As if anybody could get away with that!"

"What then?"

"What then? First he had to write a confession, then he was beaten. The beating lasted nearly all night, until his legs were broken."

"And then?"

"Well, his legs were broken."

"Yes, but after that?"

"After? . . . Who knows? He may be dead."

The tavern keeper did not pursue his questions, but went on slowly making up his accounts.

After the Mid-Autumn Festival the wind grew colder every day, as winter came on. I spent all my time by the stove, sometimes wearing my padded jacket. One afternoon, when the shop was empty, I was sitting with my eyes closed when I heard a voice:

"Warm a bowl of wine."

The voice was very low, yet familiar. But when I looked up, there was no one there. I stood up and looked towards the door, and there, beneath the counter, Kung I-chi was sitting, facing the threshold. His face was haggard and lean, and he looked in a terrible condition. He had on a ragged lined jacket, and was sitting cross-legged on a mat which was attached to his shoulders by a straw rope. When he saw me, he repeated:

"Warm a bowl of wine."

At this point my employer leaned over the counter, and said: "Is that Kung I-chi? You still owe nineteen cash!"

"That . . . I'll settle next time," replied Kung, looking up disconsolately. "Here's ready money; the wine must be good."

The tavern keeper, just as in the past, chuckled and said:

"Kung I-chi, you've been stealing again!"

But instead of protesting vigorously, the other simply said:

"You like your joke."

"Joke? If you didn't steal, why did they break your legs?"

"I fell," said Kung in a low voice. "I broke them in a fall." His eyes pleaded with the tavern keeper to let the matter drop. By now several people had gathered round, and they all laughed. I warmed the wine, carried it over, and set it on the threshold. He produced four cash from his ragged coat pocket, and placed them in my hand. As he did so I saw that his hands were covered with mud—he must have crawled here on them. Presently he finished the wine and, amid the laughter and comments of the others, slowly dragged himself off by his hands.

A long time went by after that without our seeing Kung again. At the end of the year, when the tavern keeper took down the board, he said, "Kung I-chi still owes nineteen cash!" At the Dragon Boat Festival the next year, he said the same thing again. But when the Mid-Autumn Festival came, he did not mention it. And another New Year came round without our seeing any more of him.

Nor have I ever seen him since—probably Kung I-chi is really dead.

March 1919

MEDICINE

I

IT was autumn, in the small hours of the morning. The moon had gone down, but the sun had not yet risen, leaving the sky a sheet of darkling blue. Apart from night-prowlers, all was asleep. Old Shuang suddenly sat up in bed. He struck a match and lit the grease-covered oil-lamp, which shed a ghostly light over the two rooms of the tea-house.

"Are you going, now, Dad?" queried an old woman's voice. And from the small inner room a fit of coughing was heard.

"H'm."

Old Shuang listened as he fastened his clothes, then stretching out his hand said, "Let's have it."

After some fumbling under the pillow his wife produced a packet of silver dollars which she handed over. Old Shuang pocketed it nervously, patted the outside of his pocket twice, then lighting a paper lantern and blowing out the lamp went into the inner room. A rustling was heard, and then more coughing. When all was quiet again, Old Shuang called softly: "Son! . . . Don't you get up! . . . Your mother will see to the shop."

Receiving no answer, Old Shuang assumed his son must be sound asleep again; so he went out into the street. In the darkness nothing could be seen but the grey roadway. The lantern light fell on his pacing feet. Here and there he came across dogs, but none of them barked. It was much colder than indoors, yet Old Shuang's spirits rose, as if he had grown suddenly younger and possessed some miraculous life-giving power. He had lengthened his stride. And the road became increasingly clear, the sky increasingly bright.

Absorbed in his walking, Old Shuang was startled when he saw the cross-road lying distinctly ahead of him. He walked back a few steps to stand under the eaves of a shop, in front of its closed door. After some time he began to feel chilly.

"Uh, an old chap."

"Stout fellow. . . ."

Old Shuang started again and, opening his eyes, saw several men passing. One of them even turned back to look at him, and although he could not see him clearly, the man's eyes shone with a lustful light, like a famished person's at the sight of food. Looking at his lantern, Old Shuang saw it had gone out. He patted his pocket—the hard packet was still there. Then he looked up and down, and saw many strange people, in twos and threes, wandering about like lost souls. However, when he gazed steadily at them, they ceased to look strange.

Presently he saw some soldiers strolling around. The large white circles on their uniforms, both in front and behind, were clear even at a distance; and as they drew nearer, the dark red border could be seen too. The next second, with a trampling of feet, a crowd rushed past. Thereupon the small groups which had arrived earlier suddenly converged and surged forward. When they reached the cross-road, they came to a sudden stop and grouped themselves in a semi-circle.

Old Shuang looked in that direction too, but could only see people's backs. Craning their necks as far as they would go, they looked like so many ducks, held and lifted by some invisible hand. For a moment all was still; then a sound was heard, and a stir swept through the onlookers. There was a rumble as they pushed back, sweeping past Old Shuang and nearly knocking him down.

"Hey! Give me the cash, and I'll give you the goods!" A man clad entirely in black stood before him, his eyes like daggers, making Old Shuang shrink to half his normal size. This man was thrusting one huge extended hand towards him, while in the other he held a roll of steamed bread, from which crimson drops were dripping to the ground.

Hurriedly Old Shuang fumbled for his dollars, and trembling he handed them over, but he dared not take the object. The other grew impatient, and shouted: "What are you afraid of? Why not take it?" When Old Shuang still hesitated, the man in black snatched his lantern and tore off its paper shade to wrap up the roll. This package he thrust into Old Shuang's hand, at the same time seizing the silver and giving it a cursory feel. Then he turned away, muttering, "Old fool. . . ."

"Whose sickness is this for?" Old Shuang seemed to hear someone ask; but he made no reply. His whole mind was on the package, which he carried as carefully as if it were the sole heir to an ancient house. Nothing else mattered now. He was about to transplant this new life to his own home, and reap much happiness. The sun too had risen, lighting up the broad highway before him, which led straight home, and the worn tablet behind him at the cross-road with its faded gold inscription: "Ancient Pavilion."

II

When Old Shuang reached home, the shop had been cleaned, and the rows of tea-tables were shining brightly; but no customers had arrived. Only his son was sitting at a table by the wall, eating. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, his lined jacket was sticking to his spine, and his shoulder blades stuck out so sharply, an inverted V seemed stamped there. At this sight, Old Shuang's brow, which had been clear, contracted again. His wife hurried in from the kitchen, with expectant eyes and a tremor to her lips.

"Get it?"

"Yes."

They went together into the kitchen, and conferred for a time. Then the old woman went out, to return shortly with a dried lotus leaf which she spread on the table. Old Shuang unwrapped the crimson stained roll from the lantern paper and transferred it to the lotus leaf. Little Shuang had finished his meal, but his mother exclaimed hastily:

"Sit still, Little Shuang! Don't come over here."

Mending the fire in the stove, Old Shuang put the green package and the red and white lantern paper into the stove together. A red-black flame flared up, and a strange odour permeated the shop.

"Smells good! What are you eating?" The hunchback had arrived. He was one of those who spend all their time in tea-shops, the first to come in the morning and the last to leave. Now he had just stumbled to a corner table by the street wall, and sat down. But no one answered his question.

"Fried rice gruel?"

Still no reply. Old Shuang hurried out to brew tea for him.

"Come here, Little Shuang!" His mother called him into the inner room, set a stool in the middle, and sat the child down. Then, bringing him a round black object on a plate, she said gently:

"Eat it up . . . then you'll be better."

Little Shuang picked up the black object and looked at it. He had the oddest feeling, as if he were holding his own life in his hands. Presently he split it carefully open. From the charred crust a jet of white vapour escaped, then scattered, leaving only two halves of a white flour steamed roll. Soon it was all eaten, the flavour completely forgotten, only the empty plate left. His father and mother were standing one on each side of him, their eyes apparently pouring something into him and at the same time extracting something. His small heart began to beat faster, and, putting his hands to his chest, he began to cough again.

"Have a sleep; then you'll be all right," said his mother.

Obediently, Little Shuang coughed himself to sleep. The woman waited till his breathing was regular, then covered him lightly with a much patched quilt.

III

The shop was crowded, and Old Shuang was busy, carrying a big copper kettle to pour tea for one customer after another. But there were dark circles under his eyes.

"Aren't you well, Old Shuang? . . . What's wrong with you?" asked one greybeard.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? . . . No, I suppose from your smile, there couldn't be. . . ." The old man took back what he had said.

"It's just that Old Shuang's busy," said the hunchback. "If his son. . . ." But before he could finish, a heavy-jowled man burst in. He wore a black shirt, unbuttoned and gathered carelessly into a broad black girdle at his waist. As soon as he entered, he shouted to Old Shuang:

"Has he taken it? Any better? Luck's with you, Old Shuang. What luck! If not for my hearing of things so quickly. . . ."

Holding the kettle in one hand, the other straight by his side in an attitude of respect, Old Shuang listened with a smile. In fact, all present were listening respectfully. The old woman, dark circles under her eyes too, came out smiling with a bowl containing tea-leaves and an added olive, over which Old Shuang poured boiling water for the newcomer.

"This is a guaranteed cure! Not like other things!" declared the heavy-jowled man. "Just think, brought back warm, and eaten warm!"

"Yes indeed, we couldn't have managed it without Mr. Kang's help." The old woman thanked him very warmly.

"A guaranteed cure! Eaten warm like this. A roll dipped in human blood like this can cure any consumption!"

The old woman seemed a little disconcerted by the word "consumption," and turned a shade paler; however, she forced a smile again at once and found some pretext to leave. Meanwhile the man in black remained oblivious, and went on talking at the top of his voice until the child in the inner room was woken and started coughing.

"This is such a stroke of luck for your Little Shuang! Of course his sickness will be cured completely. No wonder Old Shuang keeps smiling." As he spoke, the greybeard walked up to the man in black, and lowered his voice to ask:

"Mr. Kang, I heard the criminal executed today came from the Hsia family. Who was it? And why was he executed?"

"Who? Son of Widow Hsia, of course! Young rascal!"

Seeing how they were all hanging on his words, Mr. Kang's spirits rose even higher. His jowls quivered, and he made his voice as loud as he could.

"The rogue didn't want to live, simply didn't want to! There was nothing in it for me this time. Even the clothes stripped from him were taken by Red-eye, the jailer. Our Old Shuang was luckiest, and after him Third Uncle Hsia. He pocketed the whole reward —twenty-five ounces of bright silver—and didn't have to spend a cent!"

Little Shuang sidled out of the inner room, his hands to his chest, coughing repeatedly. He went to the kitchen, filled a bowl with cold rice, added hot water to it, and started to eat. His mother, hovering over him, asked softly:

"Do you feel better, son? Still as hungry as ever?"

"A guaranteed cure!" Kang glanced at the child, then turned back to address the company. "Third Uncle Hsia is really smart. If he hadn't informed, the whole family would have been executed, and their property confiscated. But instead? Silver! That young rogue was really bad! He even tried to incite the jailer to revolt!"

"No! The idea of it!" A man in his twenties, sitting in the back row, expressed indignation.

"You know, Red-eye went to sound him out, but he started chatting with him. He said the great Manchu empire belongs to us. Just think: is that kind of talk rational? Red-eye knew he had only a mother at home, but had never imagined he was so poor. He couldn't squeeze anything out of him; he was already good and angry, and then the young fool would 'scratch the tiger's head,' so he gave him a couple of slaps."

"Red-eye is a good boxer. Those slaps must have hurt!" The hunchback in the corner by the wall exulted.

"The rotter was not afraid of being beaten. He even said how sorry he was."

"Nothing to be sorry about in beating a wretch like that," said Greybeard.

Kang looked at him superciliously and said disdainfully: "You misunderstood. The way he said it, he was sorry for Red-eye."

His listeners' eyes took on a glazed look, and no one spoke. Little Shuang had finished his rice and was perspiring profusely, his head steaming.

"Sorry for Red-eye—crazy! He must have been crazy!" said Greybeard, as if suddenly he saw light.

"He must have been crazy!" echoed the man in his twenties.

Once more the customers began to show animation, and conversation was resumed. Under cover of the noise, the child was seized by a paroxysm of coughing. Kang went up to him, clapped him on the shoulder, and said:

"A guaranteed cure! Don't cough like that, Little Shuang! A guaranteed cure!"

"Crazy!" agreed the hunchback, nodding his head.

IV

Originally, the land adjacent to the city wall outside the West Gate had been public land. The path slanting across it, trodden out by feet seeking a short cut, had become a natural boundary line. Left of the path, executed criminals or those who had died of neglect in prison were buried. Right of the path were paupers' graves. The serried ranks of grave mounds on both sides looked like the rolls laid out for a rich man's birthday.

The Spring Festival that year was unusually cold. Willows were only beginning to put forth tiny shoots. It had not been light long before Old Shuang's wife brought four dishes and a bowl of rice to set before a new grave in the right section, and wailed before it. When she had burned paper money she remained there in a stupor as if waiting for something; but for what, she herself did not know. A breeze sprang up and stirred her short hair, which was certainly whiter than the previous year.

Another woman came down the path, grey-haired and in rags. She was carrying an old, round, red-lacquered basket, with a string of paper money hanging from it; and she walked haltingly. When she saw Old Shuang's wife sitting on the ground watching her, she hesitated, and a flush of shame spread over her pale face. However, she summoned up courage to cross over to a grave in the left section, where she set down her basket.

That grave was directly opposite Little Shuang's, separated only by the path. As Old Shuang's wife watched the other woman set out four dishes and a bowl of rice, then stand up to wail and burn paper money, she thought: "It must be someone's son in that grave too." The older woman took a few aimless steps and stared vacantly around, then suddenly she began to tremble and stagger backward, her eyes wide and fearful.

Fearing sorrow might send her out of her mind, Old Shuang's wife got up and stepped across the path, to say quietly: "Don't grieve, let's go home."

The other nodded, but her eyes were still fixed, and she muttered: "Look! What's that?"

Looking where she pointed, Old Shuang's wife saw that the grave in front had not yet been overgrown with grass. Ugly patches of soil still showed. But when she looked carefully, she was surprised to see at the top of the mound a wreath of red and white flowers.

Both of them suffered from failing eyesight, yet they could see these red and white flowers clearly. There were not many, but they were placed in a circle; and although not very fresh, were neatly set out. Little Shuang's mother glanced at his and the other graves; but they had only a few small, pale flowers, scattered here and there. She was conscious suddenly of a sense of emptiness, which she shrank from defining.

Meantime the old woman had gone up to the grave to look more closely. "They have no roots," she said to herself. "They can't have grown here. Who could have been here? Children don't come here to play, and none of our relatives have ever been. What could have happened?" She puzzled over it, until suddenly her tears began to fall, and she cried aloud:

"Son, they all wronged you, and you do not forget.

Is your grief still so great that today you worked this wonder to let me know?"

She looked all around, but could see only a crow perched on a leafless bough. "I know," she continued. "They murdered you. But a day of reckoning will come, Heaven will see to it. Close your eyes in peace. . . . If you are really here, and can hear me, make that crow fly onto your grave as a sign."

The breeze had long since dropped, and the dry grasses stood stiff and straight as copper wires. A faint, tremulous sound vibrated in the air, then faded and died away. All around was deathly still. They stood in the dry grass, looking up at the crow; and the crow, on the rigid bough of the tree, its head drawn in, stood immobile as iron.

Time passed. More people, young and old, came to visit the graves.

Old Shuang's wife felt, unaccountably, as if a load had been lifted from her mind and, wanting to leave, she urged the other:

"Let's go."

The old woman sighed, and disconsolately picked up the rice and dishes. After a moment's hesitation she started slowly off, still muttering to herself:

"What could it mean?"

They had not gone thirty paces when they heard a loud caw behind them. They looked round, startled, and saw the crow stretch its wings, brace itself to take off, then fly like an arrow towards the far horizon.

April 1919

AN INCIDENT

SIX years have slipped by since I came from the country to the capital. During that time I have seen and heard enough of so-called affairs of state to fill a book; but none of them made much impression on me. If asked to define their influence, I can only say they aggravated my ill temper and made me, frankly speaking, more and more misanthropic.

One incident, however, struck me as significant, and aroused me from my ill temper, so that even now I cannot forget it.

It happened during the winter of 1917. A bitter north wind was blowing, but, to make a living, I had to be up and out early. I met scarcely a soul on the road, and had great difficulty in hiring a rickshaw to take me to S—Gate. Presently the wind dropped a little. By now the loose dust had all been blown away, leaving the roadway clean, and the rickshaw man quickened his pace. We were just approaching S—Gate when someone crossing the road was entangled in our rickshaw and fell.

It was a woman, with streaks of white in her hair, wearing ragged clothes. She had left the pavement without warning to cut across in front of us, and although the rickshaw man had made way, her tattered jacket, unbuttoned and fluttering in the wind, had caught on the shaft. Luckily the rickshaw man was already pulling up, otherwise she might have had a bad fall and been seriously injured.

Since she was lying on the ground, the rickshaw man drew up. I did not think the old woman was hurt, and there had been no witnesses to what had happened, so I resented this officiousness which might land him in trouble and was holding me up.

"It's all right," I said. "Go on."

He paid no attention, however—perhaps he had not heard—for he set down the shafts, and gently helped the old woman up. Supporting her by one arm, he asked:

"Are you all right?"

"I'm hurt."

I had seen how slowly she fell, and was sure she could not be hurt. She must be pretending, which was disgusting. The rickshaw man had asked for trouble, and now he had got it. He would have to find his own way out.

But the rickshaw man did not hesitate for a minute after the old woman said she was injured. Still holding her arm, he helped her slowly forward. I was surprised, when I looked ahead, to see a police station. Because of the high wind, there was no one outside, so the rickshaw man helped the old woman towards the gate.

Suddenly I experienced a strange sensation. At that instant, his dusty back seemed to grow larger, and the further he walked the larger he loomed, until I had to look up to him. At the same time he seemed gradually to be exerting a pressure on me, which threatened to overpower the small self under my fur-lined gown.

My vitality seemed sapped, as I sat there motionless, my mind a blank, until a policeman came out. Then I got down from the rickshaw.

The policeman came up to me, and said, "Get another rickshaw. He can't pull you any more."

Without thinking, I pulled a handful of coppers from my coat pocket and handed them to the policeman. "Please give him these," I said.

The wind had dropped completely, but the road was still quiet. I walked along thinking, but I was almost afraid to turn my thoughts inwards. Setting aside what had happened earlier, what had I meant by that handful of coppers? Was it a reward? Who was I to judge the rickshaw man? I could not answer myself.

Even now, this remains fresh in my memory. It often causes me distress, and makes me try to think about myself. The military and political affairs of those years I have forgotten as completely as the classics I read in my childhood. Yet this incident keeps coming back to me, often more vivid than in actual life, teaching me shame, urging me to reform, and giving me fresh courage and hope.

July 1920

STORM IN A TEACUP

THE sun's bright yellow rays had gradually stopped falling on the mud flat by the river. The leaves of the tallow trees beside the river were at last able to draw a parched breath, while a few striped mosquitoes danced, humming, beneath them. Less smoke was coming from the kitchen chimneys of the peasants' houses along the river, as women and children sprinkled water on the ground before their doors and brought out little tables and stools. You could tell it was time for the evening meal.

The old folk and the men sat on the low stools, fanning themselves with plantain-leaf fans as they chatted. The children raced about or squatted under the tallow trees playing games with pebbles. The women brought out steaming hot, black dried vegetables and yellow rice. Some scholars, who were passing in a pleasure boat, waxed quite lyrical at the sight. "So free from care!" they exclaimed. "Here's real rustic happiness."

The scholars were rather wide of the mark, however. And that was because they had not heard what Old Mrs. Ninepounder was saying. Old Mrs. Ninepounder was in a towering temper, whacking the legs of her stool with a tattered plantain fan.

"I've lived to seventy-nine, that's long enough," she declared. "I don't like watching everything going to the dogs—I'd rather die. We're going to have supper right away, yet they're still eating baked beans, eating us out of house and home!"

Her great-granddaughter, Sixpounder, had just come running toward her holding a handful of beans; but when she sized up the situation she flew straight to the river bank and hid herself behind a tallow tree. Then, sticking out her small head with its twin tufts, she called loudly: "Old bitch!"

Though Old Mrs. Ninepounder had lived to a great age, she was by no means deaf; she did not, however, hear what the child said, and went on muttering to herself, "Yes, indeed! Each generation is worse than the last!"

It was the somewhat unusual custom in this village for mothers to weigh their children when they were born, and then use the number of pounds they weighed as a name. Since Old Mrs. Ninepounder's celebration of her fiftieth birthday, she had gradually become a fault-finder, who was always saying that in her young days the summer had not been so hot nor the beans so tough as now. In brief, there was something radically wrong with the present-day world. Otherwise, why should Sixpounder have weighed three pounds less than her great-grandmother and one pound less than her father, Sevenpounder? This was really irrefutable evidence. So she repeated emphatically: "Yes, indeed! Each generation is worse than the last."

Her grand daughter-in-law, Mrs. Sevenpounder, had just come up to the table with a basket of rice. Planking it down on the table, she said angrily: "There you go again! Sixpounder weighed six pounds five ounces when she was born, didn't she? Your family uses private scales which weigh light, eighteen ounces to the pound. With proper sixteen-ounce scales, Sixpounder ought to have been over seven pounds. I don't believe grandfather and father really weighed a full nine or eight or ten pounds either. People may have used fourteen-ounce scales. . . ."

"Each generation is worse than the last!"

Before Mrs. Sevenpounder could answer, she saw her husband coming out from the top of the lane, and shifted her attack to shout at him: "Why are you so late back, you slacker! Where have you been all this time? You don't care how long you keep us waiting to start supper!"

Although Sevenpounder lived in the village, he had always wanted to better himself. From his grandfather to himself, not a man in his family for three generations had handled a hoe. Like his father before him he worked on a boat which went every morning from Luchen to town, and came back every evening to Luchen. As a result, he knew pretty well all that was going on. He knew, for instance, where the thunder god had struck a centipede spirit dead, or where a virgin had given birth to a demon. Though he had made a name for himself in the village, his family abided by country customs and did not light a lamp for supper in the summer; hence, if he came home late, he would be in for a scolding.

In one hand Sevenpounder held a speckled bamboo pipe, over six feet long, which had an ivory mouthpiece and a pewter bowl. He walked slowly over, hanging his head, and sat on one of the low stools. Sixpounder seized this chance to slip out and sit down beside him. She spoke to him, but he made no answer.

"Each generation is worse than the last!" grumbled Old Mrs. Ninepounder.

Sevenpounder slowly raised his head, and said with sigh: "The emperor has ascended the throne again."

Mrs. Sevenpounder was struck dumb for a moment. Then, suddenly taking in the news, she exclaimed: "Good! That means the emperor will declare another amnesty, doesn't it!"

"I've no queue," Sevenpounder sighed again.

"Does the emperor insist on queues?"

"He does."

Mrs. Sevenpounder was rather upset. "How do you know?" she demanded hastily.

"Everybody in Hsienheng Wineshop says so."

At that Mrs. Sevenpounder realized instinctively that things were in a bad way, because Hsienheng Wineshop was where you could pick up all the news. She looked angrily at Sevenpounder's shaved head, with a feeling of hatred and resentment; then fatalistically filled a bowl with rice and slapped it down before him, saying: "Hurry up and eat! Crying won't grow a queue for you, will it?"

The sun had withdrawn its last rays, and the darkling water was gradually cooling off. There was a clatter of bowls and chopsticks on the mud flat, and sweat stood out on the backs of the people there. Mrs. Sevenpounder had finished three bowls of rice when, happening to look up, she saw something that set her heart pounding. Through the tallow leaves, Mr. Chao's short plump figure could be seen approaching from the one-plank bridge. And he was wearing his long sapphire-blue linen gown. Mr. Chao was the owner of Maoyuan Wineshop in a neighbouring village, and the only notable within a radius of ten miles who was also something of a scholar. His learning gave him a little of the musty air of a departed age. He had a dozen volumes of the *Romance of the Three*

Kingdoms annotated by Chin Sheng-t'an, which he sat reading and re-reading, character by character. He could tell you not only the names of the five tiger generals, but even that Huang Chung was also known as Han Sheng, and Ma Ch'ao as Meng Chi. After the Revolution he had coiled his queue on the top of his head like a Taoist priest, and often remarked with a sigh that if Chao Yun were still alive the empire could not have been in such a bad way. Mrs. Sevenpounder's eyesight was good, and she had noticed at once that Mr. Chao was not wearing his hair like a Taoist priest today. He had the front of his head shaved, and had let his queue down. She knew that an emperor must have ascended the throne, that queues must be essential again, and that Sevenpounder must be in great danger too. For Mr. Chao did not wear this long linen gown for nothing—in fact, during the last three years he had only worn it twice. Once when his enemy Pock-marked Ah-ssu fell ill, once when Mr. Lu who had smashed up his wineshop died. This was the third time, and it must mean that something had happened to rejoice his heart and bode ill for his enemies.

Two years ago, Mrs. Sevenpounder remembered, her husband had got drunk and cursed Mr. Chao as a "bastard." Immediately she realized instinctively again the danger her husband was in, and her heart started thumping furiously.

The folk sitting at supper stood up when Mr. Chao passed by, and pointed their chopsticks at their rice bowls as they said: "Please join us, Mr. Chao."

Mr. Chao nodded greetings to all whom he passed, saying, "Don't get up!" And he made straight for Sevenpounder's table. Everybody got up hastily to greet him, and Mr. Chao said with a smile, "Don't get up." At the same time he took a good look at the food on the table.

"Those dried vegetables smell good—have you heard the news?" Mr. Chao was standing behind Sevenpounder, opposite Mrs. Sevenpounder.

"The emperor's ascended the throne," said Sevenpounder.

Watching Mr. Chao's expression, Mrs. Sevenpounder forced a smile onto her face. "Now that the emperor's ascended the throne, when will there be a general amnesty?" she asked.

"A general amnesty?—There'll be an amnesty all in good time." Then Mr. Chao's voice grew sterner. "But what about Sevenpounder's queue, eh? That's the important thing. You know how it was in the time of the Taiping rebels: keep your hair and lose your head; keep your head and lose your hair. . . ."

Sevenpounder and his wife had never read any books, so this classical lore was lost on them; but they supposed since the learned Mr. Chao said this, the situation must be extremely serious, irrevocable in fact. They felt as if they had received their death sentence. There was a buzzing in their ears, and they were unable to utter another word.

"Each generation is worse than the last." Old Mrs. Ninepounder was quite put out again, and seized this chance to speak to Mr. Chao. "The rebels nowadays just cut people's queues off, so that they look neither Buddhist nor Taoist. Were the rebels before like that too? I've lived seventy-nine years, and that's enough. The rebels in the old days wrapped their heads in lengths of red satin that hung all the way down to their heels. The prince wore yellow satin that hung down . . . yellow satin; red satin and yellow satin—I've lived long enough at seventy-nine."

"What's to be done?" muttered Mrs. Sevenpounder, standing up. "We've such a big family, young and old, and all depend on him."

"There's nothing you can do about it," said Mr. Chao. "The punishment for being without a queue is written down quite distinctly, sentence by sentence in a book. Makes no difference who you are."

When Mrs. Sevenpounder heard that it was written down in a book, she really gave up all hope. Beside herself with anxiety, she suddenly hated Sevenpounder. Pointing her chopsticks at the tip of his nose, she cried: "You've made your bed, and now you can lie on it! I said during the revolt, better not go out on the boat, better not go to town! But he would go. He rolled off to town, and they cut his queue off. He used to have a glossy black queue, but now he doesn't look like Buddhist or Taoist. He's made his own bed, he'll have to lie on it. What right has he to drag us into it? Damn crook. . . ."

Seeing Mr. Chao had arrived, the villagers finished their meals quickly and gathered round Sevenpounder's table. Sevenpounder knew how unseemly it was for a prominent citizen to be cursed in public like this by his wife. So he raised his head to say slowly:

"You've plenty to say today, but at the time. . . ."

"Damn crook!"

Widow Pa Yi had the kindest heart of all the onlookers there. With her two-year-old baby in her arms, she was standing next to Mrs. Sevenpounder watching the fun. Now she felt things had gone too far, and hurriedly tried to make peace, saying: "Never mind, Mrs. Sevenpounder. People aren't spirits, how can they foretell the future? Didn't Mrs. Sevenpounder say at the time there was nothing to be ashamed of in having no queue? Besides, the great official in the government office hasn't issued any order yet. . . ."

Before she had finished, Mrs. Sevenpounder's ears were scarlet, and she swept her chopsticks round to point at the widow's nose. "Well I never!" she protested. "What a thing to say, Mrs. Pa Yi! I'm still a human being, aren't I—how could I have said anything so ridiculous? I cried for three whole days when it happened, everybody saw. Even that imp Sixpounder cried. . . ." Sixpounder had just finished a big bowl of rice, and was holding out her bowl clamouring to have it refilled. Mrs. Sevenpounder was in a temper, and brought her chopsticks down between the twin tufts on the child's head. "Stop that noise! Little slut!"

There was a crack as the empty bowl in Sixpounder's hand fell to the ground. It struck the corner of a brick and a big piece was knocked off. Sevenpounder jumped up to pick up the bowl and examine it as he fitted the pieces together. "Damn you!" he shouted, and gave Sixpounder a slap on the face that knocked her over. Sixpounder lay there crying until Old Mrs. Ninepounder took her by the hand and walked off with her, muttering, "Each generation is worse than the last."

It was Widow Pa Yi's turn to be angry. "Hitting a child, Mrs. Sevenpounder!" she shouted.

Mr. Chao had been looking on with a smile, but when Widow Pa Yi said that the great official in the government office had not issued any order yet, he began to grow angry. Now coming right up to the table, he said: "What does it matter hitting a child? The imperial army will be here any time now. You know, the protector of the empire is General Chang, who's descended from Chang Fei of the period of the

Three Kingdoms. He has a huge lance eighteen feet long, and dares take on ten thousand men. Nobody can stand against him." Raising his empty hands, as if grasping a huge invisible lance, he took a few paces toward Widow Pa Yi, saying, "Are you a match for him?"

Widow Pa Yi was trembling with rage as she held her child. But the sudden sight of Mr. Chao bearing down on her with perspiring face and staring eyes gave her the fright of her life. Without finishing what she had to say, she turned and fled. Mr. Chao left too. The villagers blamed Widow Pa Yi for interfering as they made way, and a few men who had cut their queues and started growing them again hid hastily behind the crowd for fear Mr. Chao should see them. However, Mr. Chao passed through the group without making a careful inspection. Suddenly he dived behind the tallow trees, and with a parting "Think you're a match for him!" strode onto the one-plank bridge and was off.

The villagers stood there blankly, turning things over in their minds. They realized they really were no match for Chang Fei; hence Sevenpounder's life was as good as lost. And since Sevenpounder had broken the imperial law, they felt he should never have adopted that lordly air as he smoked that long pipe of his and told them the news in town. So the fact that he was in trouble gave them a certain pleasure. They would have liked to discuss the matter, but did not know what to say. Buzzing mosquitoes brushed past their bare arms, and zoomed back to swarm beneath the tallow trees. Then the villagers scattered to their homes, shut their doors and went to sleep. Grumbling to herself, Mrs. Sevenpounder cleared away the dishes, table and stools and went inside too, to close the door and go to sleep.

Sevenpounder took the broken bowl inside, and sat on the doorsill smoking; but he was still so worried he forgot to pull on the pipe, and the light in the pewter bowl of his six-foot speckled bamboo pipe with the ivory mouthpiece gradually turned black. Matters seemed to have reached a very dangerous state, and he tried to think of a way out or some plan of action. But his thoughts were in a whirl, and he could not straighten them out. "Queues, eh, queues? A huge eighteen-foot lance. Each generation is worse than the last! The emperor's ascended his throne. The broken bowl will have to be taken to town to be riveted. Who's a match for him? It's written in a book. Damn! . . ."

The next morning Sevenpounder went with the boat to town as usual. Toward evening he came back to Luchen, with his six-foot speckled bamboo pipe and the rice bowl. At supper he told Old Mrs. Ninepounder he had had the bowl riveted in town. Because it was such a large break, sixteen copper clamps had been needed, and they cost three cash each—making a total of forty-eight cash altogether.

"Each generation is wrose than the last," said Old Mrs. Ninepounder crossly. "I've lived long enough. Three cash for a clamp. These aren't like the clamps we used to have. In the old days. . . ah. . . . I've lived seventy-nine years. . . ."

Though Sevenpounder was going into town every day as before, his house seemed to be under a cloud. Most of the villagers kept out of his way, no longer coming to ask him what the news was in town. Mrs. Sevenpounder was always in a bad temper too, and continued to address him as "Crook."

About a fortnight later, when Sevenpounder came back from town, he found his wife in a rare good humour. "Hear anything in town?" she asked him.

"No, nothing."

"Has the emperor ascended his throne?"

"They didn't say."

"Did no one in Hsienheng Wineshop say anything?"

"No, nothing."

"I don't think the emperor can have ascended the throne. I passed Mr. Chao's wineshop today, and he was sitting there reading again, with his queue coiled on the top of his head. He wasn't wearing his long gown either."

". . . ."

"Do you think maybe he hasn't ascended the throne?"

"I think probably not."

The Sevenpounder of today has long been respected and well treated by his wife and the villagers again. In the summer his family still sit on the mud flat outside their door to eat; and passers-by greet them with smiles. Old Mrs. Ninepounder celebrated her eightieth birthday some time ago, and is as hale and hearty as ever, and as full of complaints. Sixpounder's twin tufts of hair have changed into a thick braid. Although they started binding her feet recently, she can still help Mrs. Sevenpounder with odd jobs, and limps about the mud flat carrying the rice bowl with its sixteen copper rivets.

October 1920

MY OLD HOME

BRAVING the bitter cold, I travelled back more than seven hundred miles to the old home I had left for over twenty years.

It was the depth of winter. As we drew near my former home the day became overcast and a cold wind blew into the cabin of our boat, while all one could see through the chinks in our bamboo awning were a few desolate villages scattered far and near under the sombre yellow sky, void of any sign of life. I could not help beginning to feel depressed.

Ah! Surely this was not the old home I had been remembering for the past twenty years?

The old home I remembered was not in the least like this. My old home was much better. But if you asked me to recall its peculiar charm or describe its beauties, I had no clear impression, no words to describe it. And now it seemed this was all there was to it. Then I rationalized the matter to myself, saying: Home was always like this, and although it has not improved, still it is not necessarily as depressing as I imagine; it is only my mood that has changed, because I am coming back to the country this time with no illusions.

This time I had come with the sole object of saying goodbye. The old house we had lived in for so many years had already been sold to another family, and was to change hands before the end of the year. I had to hurry there before New Year's Day to say goodbye forever to the familiar old house, and to leave far behind my familiar native village, moving my family to another place where I was working.

At dawn on the second day I reached the gateway of my home. Broken stems of withered grass on the roof, trembling in the wind, were making very clear the reason why this old house could not avoid changing hands. Several branches of the original family had probably already moved away, so that it was unusually quiet. By the time I reached the house my mother was already at the door to welcome me, and my eight-year-old nephew, Hung-erh, flew out after her.

Mother was very happy, but she was also trying to conceal a certain feeling of sadness. She told me to sit down and rest and have some tea, but said nothing about the removal. Hung-erh, who had never seen me before, stood watching me at a distance.

But finally we had to talk about the removal. I said that rooms had already been rented elsewhere, and I had bought a little furniture; in addition it would be necessary to sell all the furniture in the house in order to buy more things. Mother agreed, saying that the luggage was nearly all assembled, and since the furniture could not be removed easily, about half of it had already been sold. Only it was difficult to get people to pay up.

"You can rest for a day or two, and call on our relatives, and then we can go," said Mother.

"Yes."

"Then there is Yun-tu. Each time he comes here he always asks after you, and wants very much to see you again. I told him the probable date of your return home, and he may be coming any time."

At this point a strange picture suddenly flashed into my mind: a golden moon suspended in a deep blue sky and beneath it the seashore, planted as far as the eye could see with jade-green watermelons, while in the midst a boy of eleven or twelve, wearing a silver necklet and grasping a steel pitchfork in his hand, was thrusting with all his might at a badger which dodged the blow and escaped through his legs.

This boy was Yun-tu. When I first met him he was little more than ten—that was thirty years ago, and at that time my father was still alive and the family well off, so I was really a spoilt child. That year was the year for a big ancestral sacrifice in our family. This sacrifice came round only once in thirty years, hence it was an important one. In the first month the ancestral images were presented and offerings made, and since the sacrificial vessels were very fine and there was such a crowd of worshippers, it was necessary to guard against theft. Our family had only one part-time servant. (In our district we divide servants into three classes: those who work all the year for one family are called full-timers; those who are hired by the day are called dailies; and those who farm their own land and only work for one family at New Year or during festivals or harvests are called part-timers.) And since there was so much to be done, he told my father that he would send for his son Yun-tu to look after the sacrificial vessels.

When my father gave his consent I was overjoyed, because I had long since heard of Yun-tu and knew that he was about my own age, born in the intercalary month,* and when his horoscope was told it was found that of the five elements** that of earth was lacking, so his father called him Yun-tu (Intercalary Earth). He could set traps and catch small birds.

After this I looked forward every day to New Year, for New Year would bring Yun-tu. At last the end of the year came, and one day Mother told me that Yun-tu had come, and I flew to see him. He was standing in the kitchen. He had a round, crimson face and wore a small felt cap on his head and a silver necklet on his neck, showing that his father doted on him and, fearing he might die, had made a pledge with the gods and buddhas, using the necklet to keep him safe from harm. He was very shy, and I was the only person he was not afraid of; but when there was no one else there, he would talk with me, so in a few hours we were fast friends.

I don't know what we talked of then, but I remember that Yun-tu was in high spirits, saying that since he had come to town he had seen many new things.

The next day I wanted him to catch birds.

"Can't be done," he said. "It's only possible after a heavy snowfall. On our sands, after it snows, I sweep clear a patch of ground, prop up a big threshing basket with a short stick, and scatter husks of grain beneath; then when I see the sparrows coming to eat, from a distance I give a tug to the string tied to the stick, and the birds are caught in the basket. There are all kinds: wild pheasants, woodcocks, cuckoos, bluebacks. . . ."

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* The Chinese lunar calendar reckons 360 days to a year, and each month comprises 29 or 30 days, never 31. Hence every few years a 13th, or intercalary, month is inserted in the calendar.

** In ancient China, as in ancient Greece, certain things were considered as the elements from which all else evolved. In China the five elements were: metal, wood, water, fire, earth. One system of fortune-telling is based on the five elements.

Accordingly I looked forward very eagerly to snow.

"Just now it is too cold," said Yun-tu another time, "but you must come to our place in summer. In the daytime we will go to the seashore to look for shells; there are green ones and red ones, besides 'scare-devil' shells and 'buddha's hands.' In the evening when Dad and I go to see to the watermelons, you shall come too."

"Is it to look out for thieves?"

"No. If passers-by are thirsty and pick a watermelon, folk down our way don't consider it as stealing. What we have to look out for are small hogs, hedgehogs and badgers. When you hear a crunching sound under the moonlight, made by the badger biting the melons, then you take your pitchfork and creep stealthily over. . . ."

I had no idea then what this thing called badger was—and I am not much clearer now, for that matter—but I felt sure it was something like a small dog, and very fierce.

"Don't they bite people?"

"You have a pitchfork. You go across, and when you see it you strike. It's a very cunning creature and will rush toward you and get away between your legs. Its fur is as slippery as oil. . . ."

I had never known that all these strange things existed: at the seashore were shells all the colours of the rainbow; watermelons had such a dangerous history, yet all I had known of them before was that they were sold in the greengrocer's.

"On our shore, when the tide comes in, there are lots of jumping fish, each with two legs like a frog. . . ."

Yun-tu's mind was a treasure-house of such strange lore, all of it outside the ken of my other friends. They were ignorant of all these things, and while Yun-tu lived by the sea they, like me, could only see the four corners of the sky above the high courtyard wall.

Unfortunately, when the first month was over, Yun-tu had to go home. I burst into tears and he took refuge in the kitchen, crying and refusing to come out, until finally he was carried off by his father. Later he sent me by his father a packet of shells and a few very beautiful feathers, and I sent him presents once or twice, but we never saw each other again.

Now that my mother mentioned him, this childhood memory sprang into life like a flash of lightning, and I seemed to see my beautiful old home. So I answered:

"Fine! And he—how is he?"

"He? . . . He's not at all well off either," said Mother. And then, looking out of the door: "Here come those people again. They say they want to buy our furniture; but actually they just want to see what they can pick up. I must go and watch them."

Mother stood up and went out. Several women's voices could be heard outside. I called Hung-erh to me and started talking to him, asking him whether he could write, and whether he was glad to be leaving.

"Will we be going by train?"

"Yes, we shall go by train."

"And boat?"

"We shall take a boat first."

"Oh! Like this! With such a long moustache!" A strange shrill voice suddenly rang out.

I looked up with a start, and saw a woman of about fifty with prominent cheekbones and thin lips standing in front of me, her hands on her hips, not wearing a skirt but with trousered legs apart, just like the compass in a box of geometrical instruments.

I was flabbergasted.

"Don't you know me? Although I have held you in my arms!"

I felt even more flabbergasted. Fortunately my mother came in just then and said:

"He has been away so long, you must excuse him for forgetting. You should remember," she said to me, "this is Mrs. Yang from across the road. . . . She has a beancurd shop."

Then, to be sure, I remembered. When I was a child there was a Mrs. Yang who used to sit nearly all day long in the beancurd shop across the road, and everybody used to call her Beancurd Beauty. But she used to powder herself, and her cheekbones were not so prominent then nor her lips so thin; moreover she remained seated all the time, so that I had never noticed this resemblance to a compass. In those days people said that, thanks to her, that beancurd shop did very good business. But, probably on account of my age, she had made no impression on me, so that later I forgot her entirely. However, the Compass was extremely indignant and looked at me most contemptuously, just as one might look at a Frenchman who had never heard of Napoleon or an American who had never heard of Washington, and smiling sarcastically she said:

"You had forgotten? But naturally I must be beneath your notice. . . ."

"Certainly not . . . I . . ." I answered nervously, getting to my feet.

"Then you listen to me, Master Hsun. You have grown rich, and they are too heavy to move, so you can't possibly want these old pieces of furniture any more. You had better let me take them away. Poor people like us can do with them."

"I haven't grown rich. I must sell these in order to buy. . . ."

"Oh, come now, you have been made a governor, and do you still say you are not rich? You have three concubines now, and whenever you go out it is in a big sedan-chair with eight bearers, and do you still say you are not rich? Hah! You can't hide anything from me."

Knowing there was nothing I could say I remained silent, standing there without a word.

"Come now, really, the more money people have the more miserly they get, and the more miserly they are the more money they get . . ." said the Compass, turning indignantly away and walking slowly off, casually picking up a pair of Mother's gloves and stuffing them into her pocket as she went out.

After this a number of nearby members of the family and other relatives came to call. In the intervals between entertaining them I did some packing, and so three or four days passed.

One very cold afternoon, I was sitting drinking tea after lunch when I was aware of someone coming in, and turned my head to see who it was. At the first glance I gave an involuntary start, and hastily stood up and went over to welcome him.

The newcomer was Yun-tu. But although I knew at a glance that this was Yun-tu, it was not the Yun-tu I remembered. He had grown to twice his former size. His round face, crimson before, had become sallow and acquired deep lines and wrinkles; his eyes too had become like his father's with rims swollen and red, and I knew that most of the peasants who worked by the sea and were exposed day and night to the wind from the ocean were like this. He wore a shabby felt cap and just one very thin padded jacket, with the result that he was shivering from head to foot. He was carrying a paper package and a long pipe, nor was his hand the plump red hand I remembered, but coarse and clumsy and chapped, like the bark of a pine tree.

Delighted as I was, I did not know how to express myself, and could only say:

"Oh! Yun-tu—so it's you? . . ."

After this there were so many things I wanted to talk about, they should have poured out like a string of beads: wild pheasants, jumping fish, shells, badgers. . . . But I was tongue-tied, unable to put all I was thinking into words.

He stood there, pleasure and pathos showing on his face. His lips moved, but not a sound did he utter. Finally, assuming a respectful attitude, he said clearly:

"Sir! . . ."

I felt a shiver run through me; for I knew then what a lamentably thick wall had grown up between us. Yet I could not say anything.

He turned his head to call:

"Shui-sheng, bow to the master." Then he pulled forward a boy who had been hiding behind his back, and this was just the Yun-tu of twenty years before, only a little paler and thinner, and he had no silver necklet on his neck.

number of visitors, some to see us off, some to fetch things, and some to do both. It was nearly evening when we got on the boat, and by that time everything in the house, however old or shabby, large or small, fine or coarse, had been cleared away.

As we set off, the green mountains on the two banks became deep blue in the dusk, receding toward the stern of the boat.

Hung-erh and I, leaning against the cabin window, were looking out together at the indistinct scene outside, when suddenly he asked:

"Uncle, when shall we go back?"

"Go back? Do you mean that before you've left you want to go back?"

"Well, Shui-sheng has invited me to his home. . . ." He opened wide his black eyes in anxious thought.

Mother and I both felt rather sad, and so Yun-tu's name came up again. Mother said that ever since our family started packing up, Mrs. Yang from the beancurd shop had come over every day, and the day before in the ash-heap she had unearthed a dozen bowls and plates, which after some discussion she insisted must have been buried there by Yun-tu, so that when he came to remove the ashes he could take them home at the same time. After making this discovery Mrs. Yang was very pleased with herself, and flew off taking the dog-teaser with her. (The dog-teaser is used by poultry keepers in our part. It is a wooden cage inside which food is put, so that hens can stretch their necks in to eat but dogs can only look on furiously.) And it was a marvel, considering the size of her feet, how fast she could run.

I was leaving the old house farther and farther behind, while the hills and rivers of my old home were receding too gradually ever farther in the distance. But I felt no regret. I only felt that all round me was an invisible high wall, cutting me off from my fellows, and this made me thoroughly depressed. The vision of that small hero with the silver necklet among the watermelons had formerly been as clear as day, but now it had suddenly blurred, making me thoroughly depressed.

Mother and Hung-erh fell asleep.

I lay down, listening to the water rippling beneath the boat, and knew that I was going my way. I thought: although there is such a barrier between Yun-tu and myself, our children still have much in common, for wasn't Hung-erh thinking of Shui-sheng just now? I hope they will not be like us, that they will not allow a barrier to grow up between them. But again I would not like them, because they want to be one, to struggle like myself through hardships, nor to suffer like Yun-tu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced.

The access of hope made me suddenly afraid. When Yun-tu had asked for the incense burner and candlesticks I had laughed up my sleeve at him, to think that he was still worshipping idols and would never put them out of his mind. Yet what I now called hope was no more than an idol I had created myself. It was just that what he desired was close at hand, while what I desired was less easily realized.

As I dozed, a stretch of jade-green seashore spread itself before my eyes, and above a round golden moon hung from a deep blue sky. I thought: hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.

January 1921

VILLAGE OPERA

DURING the past twenty years I have been to the Chinese opera only twice. During the first ten years I never went, having neither the desire nor the occasion. Both my visits to the opera were in the past ten years, but each time I left without seeing anything in it.

The first time was in 1912 when I was new to Peking. A friend told me Peking had the best opera and that seeing it was an experience I shouldn't miss. I thought it might be interesting, especially in Peking, to see an opera, and hurried in high spirits to some theatre, the name of which I have forgotten. The performance had already started, and the beat of the drums could be heard outside. As we squeezed in, bright colours flashed in view, and I saw many heads in the auditorium; as I scanned the theatre I saw a few seats in the middle were still empty. But when I squeezed in to sit down, someone spoke up. There was such a throbbing in my ears that I had to listen attentively to catch what he was saying—"Sorry, these seats are taken!"

We went to the back, but then a man with a glossy queue led us to a side aisle, and indicated an unoccupied place. This was a bench only three-quarters the width of my thighs, but with legs nearly twice as long as mine. To begin with I hadn't the courage to get up there, and then it reminded me of some instrument of torture, and with an involuntary shudder I fled.

I had gone some distance, when I heard my friend's voice, asking: "Well, how did you like it?" And looking over my shoulder I saw he had followed me out. He seemed very surprised. "Why do you march along without a word?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry," I told him. "There's such a pounding in my ears, I didn't hear you."

Whenever I thought back on the incident, it struck me as very strange, and I supposed that opera had been a very poor one—or else a theatre was no place for me nowadays.

I forget in what year I made the second venture, but funds were being raised for flood victims in Hupeh, and Tan Hsin-pei was still alive. By paying two dollars for a ticket, you contributed money and could go to the Number One Theatre to see an opera with a cast made up for the most part of famous actors, one being Tan Hsin-pei himself. I bought a ticket primarily to satisfy the collector, but then some busy-body seized the opportunity to tell me why Tan Hsin-pei simply had to be seen, and I forgot the disastrous din and crash of a few years before, and went to the theatre. Probably half inclined because of the steep price of that precious ticket, I knew I wouldn't feel comfortable if I didn't use it. I learned that Tan Hsin-pei made his appearance late in the evening, and Number One Theatre was a modern one where you didn't have to fight for your seat. That reassured me, and I waited till nine o'clock before setting out. To my surprise, just as before, it was full. There was hardly any standing room and I had to squeeze into the crowd at the rear to watch an actor singing an old woman's part. He had a paper spill burning at each corner of his mouth and there was a devil-soldier beside him. I racked my brains and guessed that this might be Mu Lien's mother, because the next to come on was a monk. Not recognizing the actor, I asked a fat gentleman squeezed in at my left. "Kung Yun-fu!" he said, throwing me a withering look from the corner of his eye. My face burned with shame for my ignorant blunder, and I mentally resolved that at all costs I would ask no more questions. Then I watched a heroine and her maid sing, next an old man and some other characters I couldn't identify. After that, I watched a whole group fight a free-for-all, and after that, two or three people fighting together—from after nine till ten, from ten till eleven, from eleven till eleven thirty, from eleven thirty till twelve: but there was no sign of Tan Hsin-pei.

Never in my life have I waited for anything so patiently. But the wheezes of the fat gentleman next to me, the clanging, tinkling, drumming and gonging on the stage, the whirl of bright colours and the lateness of the hour suddenly made me realize that this was no place for me. Mechanically I turned round, and tried with might and main to shove my way out. I felt the place behind me fill up at once—no doubt the elastic fat gentleman had expanded his right side into my empty place. With my retreat cut off, naturally there was nothing to do but push and push till at last I was out of the gate. Apart from the rickshaws waiting for the playgoers, there was practically no one walking outside, but there were still a dozen people by the gate looking up at the programme, and another group not looking at anything, who must, I thought, be waiting to watch the women come out after the show was over. And no sign of Tan Hsin-pei. . . .

But the night air was so brisk, it went right through you. This seemed to be the first time I had known such good air in Peking.

I said goodbye to the Chinese opera that night. I never thought about it again, and if by any chance I passed a theatre, it meant nothing to me, for in spirit we were poles apart.

A few days ago, however, I happened to read a Japanese book—unfortunately I have forgotten the title and author, but it was about the Chinese opera. One chapter made the point that the Chinese opera is so full of gongs and cymbals, shouting and jumping, that it makes the onlookers' heads swim. It is quite unsuited for presentation in a theatre but, if performed in the country and watched from a distance, it has its charm. I felt this put into words what had remained unformulated in my mind, because as a matter of fact I did clearly remember seeing a really good opera in the country, and it was under its influence, perhaps, I twice went to the theatre after coming to Peking. It's a pity that, somehow or other, I've forgotten the name of that book.

As to when I saw that good opera, it was really "long, long ago," and I could not have been much more than eleven or twelve. It was the custom in Luchen where we lived for married women who were not yet in charge of the household to go back to their parents' home for the summer. Although my father's mother was then still quite strong, my mother had quite a few household duties. She could not spend many days at her own home during the summer. She could only take a few days after visiting the ancestral graves. At such times I always went with her to stay in her parents' house. It was in a place called Pingchiao Village, not far from the sea, a very out-of-the-way little village on the river, with less than thirty households, peasants and fishermen, and just one tiny grocery. In my eyes, however, it was heaven, for not only was I treated as a guest of honour, but I could skip reading the *Book of Odes*.

There were many children for me to play with. For with the arrival of a visitor from such a distance they got permission from their parents to do less work so as to play with me. In a small village the guest of one family is virtually the guest of the whole community. We were all about the same age, but when it came to identifying generations, many were at least my uncles or granduncles, since everybody in the village had the same family name and belonged to one clan. But we were good friends, and if by some chance we had a falling out and I hit one of my granduncles, it never occurred to any child or grown-up in the village to call it "disrespect to elders." Ninety-nine out of a hundred of them could neither read nor write.

We spent most of our days digging up worms, putting them on little hooks made of copper wire, and lying on the river bank to catch shrimps. Shrimps are the silliest water creatures: they willingly use their own pincers to push the point of the hook into their mouths; so in a few hours we could catch a big bowlful. It was the custom to give these shrimps to me. Another thing we did was to take the buffaloes out together, but, maybe because they are animals of a higher species, buffaloes are hostile to strangers, and treated me with contempt, at the bridge. We jumped aboard, Shuang-hsi seized the front pole and Ah-fa the back one; the younger boys sat down with me in the middle of the boat, while the older ones went to the stern. By the time Mother had followed us out to say "Be careful!" we had already cast off. We pushed off from the bridge, floated back a few feet, then moved forward under the bridge. Two oars were set up, each manned by two boys who changed shifts every third of a mile. Chatter, laughter and shouts mingled with the lapping of the water against the bow of our boat; to our right and left, as we flew forward towards Chaochuang, were emerald green fields of beans and wheat in the river valley.

Mingled with the mist on the water, the scent of the beans and wheat and of the weeds on the bottom of the river was wafted onto our faces; and the moonlight shone faintly through the mist. In the distance, grey undulating hills, like the backs of some leaping iron beasts, seemed to be racing past the stern of our boat; yet I felt our boat was slow. When the oarsmen had changed shifts four times, it was just possible to see the faint outline of Chaochuang, and we faintly caught the sound of singing. There were several lights too, which we guessed must be on the stage, unless they were fishermen's lights.

The music we heard was probably flutes. Eddying round and round and up and down, it soothed me and set me dreaming at the same time, till I felt I was about to drift far away with it in the night air heavy with the scent of beans and wheat and water-plants.

As we approached the lights, we found they were fishermen's lights after all, and I realized I hadn't been looking at Chaochuang at all. Directly ahead of us was a pine wood where I had played the year before. I could still see the broken stone horse that had fallen on its side, and a stone sheep couched in the grass. When we passed the wood, the boat rounded a bend into a cove, and Chaochuang was really before us.

Our eyes were drawn to the stage standing in a plot of empty ground by the river outside the village, hazy in the distant moonlight, barely distinguishable from its surroundings. It seemed that the fairyland I had seen in pictures had come alive here. The boat was moving faster now, and presently we could make out figures on the stage and a blaze of bright colours, and we saw that where the river was close to the stage it was black with the boat awnings of people come to watch the play.

"There's no room near the stage, let's watch from a distance," suggested Ah-fa.

The boat had slowed down now, and we soon arrived. True enough, it was impossible to get close to the stage. We had to make our boat fast further from the stage than the shrine opposite it. Still, our boat with its white awning had never wanted to associate with those black boats, and there was no room for us anyway. . . .

In the excitement of stopping, on the stage I saw a man with a long black beard who had four flags fixed to his back. He was grasping a spear and fighting a whole group of bare-armed men. Shuang-hsi told us this was a famous acrobat who could turn eighty-four somersaults, one after the other. He had counted for himself earlier in the day.

We all crowded to the bow to watch the fighting, but the acrobat didn't turn any somersaults. Some of the bare-armed men turned head over heels a few times, then trooped off. Then a girl came out, and sang in a squeaky voice. "There aren't many people in the evening," said Shuang-hsi, "and the acrobat's tired. Nobody wants to show his skill without an audience." That was common sense, because by then there really weren't many people left to watch. The country folk had work the next day, and couldn't stay up all night, so they had all gone to bed. Just a sprinkling of a score or so of idlers from Chaochuang and the villages around remained standing about. The families of the local rich were still there in the boats with black awnings, but they weren't really interested in the opera. Most of them had gone to the foot of the stage to eat cakes, fruit or melon seeds. So it really amounted to no audience.

As a matter of fact, I wasn't keen on the somersaults. What I most wanted to see was a snake spirit swathed in white, its two hands clasping a wand-like snake's head on its head. My second choice was a leaping tiger dressed in yellow. But though I waited a long time, they didn't appear. The girl went in, but then a very old man acting the part of a young man came out at once. I was rather tired and asked Kuei-sheng to buy me some soya-bean milk. He came back in a little while to say: "There isn't any. The deaf man who sells it has gone. There was some in the daytime, I drank two bowls then. I'll go get you a dipperful of water to drink."

I didn't drink the water, but stuck it out as best I could. I can't say what I saw, but it seemed that the faces of the players were gradually becoming very strange, the features blurred as if they had melted into one flat surface. Most of the younger boys were yawning, while the older ones were chatting among themselves. It was only when a clown in a red shirt was fastened to a pillar on the stage, and a greybeard started horsewhipping him that we all roused ourselves to watch again, laughing. I really think it was the best scene of the evening.

But then the old woman came out. This was the character I most dreaded, and I was terrified she would sit down and sing. Now I saw by everybody's disappointment that they felt as I did. In the beginning, the old woman just walked to and fro singing, then she sat on a chair in the middle of the stage. I was really distressed, and Shuang-hsi and the others started swearing. I waited patiently until, after a long time, the old woman raised her hand, and I thought she was going to stand up. But despite my hopes she lowered her hand slowly to its original position, and went on singing just as before. Some of the boys in the boat couldn't help groaning, and the rest began yawning again. Finally Shuang-hsi couldn't stand it any longer. He said he was afraid the old woman would go on singing till dawn, and we had better leave. We all promptly agreed, and became as eager as when we had set out. Three or four boys ran to the stern and seized the poles to punt back several yards, then headed the boat around and set up the oars, cursing the old singer, and started back for the pine wood.

The moon had not yet gone down, as if we had not been watching very long, and once we left Chaochuang the moonlight seemed unusually bright. When we turned back to see the lantern-lit stage, it looked just as it had when we came, hazy as a fairy pavilion, covered in a rosy mist. And once again the flutes piped melodiously in our ears. I thought the old woman must have finished, but couldn't very well suggest going back again to see.

Soon the pine wood was behind us. Our boat was moving rather fast, but there was such thick darkness all around you could tell it was very late. As they discussed the players, laughing and swearing, the rowers pulled faster on the oars. And this time the plash of water against our bow was even more distinct. The boat seemed like a great white fish carrying a freight of children on its back through the foam. Some old fishermen who fished all night stopped their punts to cheer at the sight.

We were still about a third of a mile from Pingchiao Village when our boat slowed down, and the oarsmen said they were tired after rowing so hard. And we'd had nothing to eat for hours. It was Kuei-sheng who had a brilliant idea this time. He said the *lohan* beans were ripe, and we had fuel on the boat—we could use a little to cook the beans. Everybody agreed, and we immediately headed towards the bank. The pitch-black fields were filled with succulent beans.

"Hey! Ah-fa! It's your family's over here, and Old Liu Yi's over there. Which shall we take?" Shuang-hsi had been the first to leap ashore, and was calling from the bank.

We all jumped ashore too, Ah-fa saying as he did so: "Wait a minute and I'll take a look." He walked up and down feeling the beans, then straightened up to say: "Take ours, they're much bigger." With a shout we scattered in the bean field of Ah-fa's family, each picked a big handful of beans and threw them in the boat. Shuang-hsi thought that if we took any more and Ah-fa's mother found out, there would be trouble, so we all went to Old Liu Yi's field to pick another handful each.

Then a few of the older boys started rowing slowly again, while others lit a fire in the stern, and the younger boys and I shelled the beans. Soon they were cooked, and we let the boat drift while we gathered round and ate them with our fingers. When we had finished eating we went on again, washing the utensils and throwing the pods into the river, to destroy all traces. Shuang-hsi was uneasy because we had used the salt and firewood on Eighth Granduncle's boat, and the old man was so sharp he would be sure to find out and scold us. But after some discussion we decided there was nothing to fear. If he did scold us we would ask him to return the pine branch he had taken the previous year from the river bank, and call him "Old Scabby" to his face.

"We're all back! How could anything have happened? Didn't I guarantee it would be all right!" Shuang-hsi's voice suddenly rang out from the bow.

Looking past him, I saw we were already at Pingchiao Village, and someone was standing at the foot of the bridge—it was Mother. It was to her that Shuang-hsi was calling. As I walked up to the bow the boat passed under the bridge, then stopped, and we all went ashore. Mother was rather annoyed, and asked how we could come back so late—it was after midnight. But she was soon in a good humour again, and smiled as she invited everybody to come back and have some puffed rice.

They told her we had all eaten something, and were sleepy, so they had better get to bed at once, and off we all went to our own homes.

I didn't get up till noon the next day, and there was no word of any trouble with Eighth Granduncle over the salt or firewood. In the afternoon we caught shrimps as usual.

"Shuang-hsi, you young rascals stole my beans yesterday! And you didn't pick them properly, you trampled down quite a few." I looked up and saw Old

Liu Yi on a punt, coming back from selling beans. There was still a heap of left-over beans at the bottom of the punt.

"Yes. We were treating a visitor. We didn't mean to take yours to begin with," said Shuang-hsi. "Look! You've frightened away my shrimp!"

When the old man saw me, he stopped punting, and chuckled. "Treating a visitor? So you should." Then he asked me: "Was yesterday's opera good, Hsun?"

"Yes." I nodded.

"Did you enjoy the beans?"

"Very much." I nodded again.

To my surprise, the old man was greatly pleased. He stuck up a thumb, and declared with satisfaction: "People from big towns who have studied really know what's good. I select my bean seeds one by one. Country folk can't tell good from bad, and say my beans aren't as good as other people's. I'll give some to your mother today for her to try. . . ." Then he punted off.

When Mother called me home to eat, there was a large bowl of boiled beans on the table, which Old Liu Yi had brought for her and me to eat. I heard he had praised me highly to Mother, saying, "He's so young, yet he knows what's what. He's sure to pass all the official examinations in future. Your fortune's as good as made." But when I ate the beans, they didn't taste as good as the ones we'd eaten the night before.

It's a fact, right up till now, I've really never eaten such good beans as I did that night—and never again seen such a good opera as I did that night.

October 1922

THE NEW YEAR'S SACRIFICE

NEW Year's Eve of the old calendar* seems after all more like the real New Year's Eve; for, to say nothing of the villages and towns, even in the air there is a feeling that New Year is coming. From the pale, lowering evening clouds issue frequent flashes of lightning, followed by a rumbling sound of firecrackers celebrating the departure of the Hearth God; while, nearer by, the firecrackers explode even more violently, and before the deafening report dies away the air is already filled with a faint smell of powder. It was on such a night that I returned to my native place, Luchen. Although I call it my native place, I had had no home there for some time, so that I had to put up temporarily with a certain Mr. Lu, the fourth son of his family. He is a member of our clan, and belongs to the generation before mine, so I ought to call him "Fourth Uncle." An old scholar who studied Neo-Confucianism, I found him very little changed in any way, simply slightly older, but without yet having grown a moustache. When we met, after exchanging a few polite remarks, he said I was fatter, and after saying I was fatter immediately started a violent attack on the revolutionaries. I knew this was not meant personally, because the object of the attack was still Kang Yu-wei. Nevertheless, conversation proved difficult, so that in a short time I found myself alone in the study.

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* The Chinese lunar calendar.

The next day I got up very late, and after lunch went out to see some relatives and friends. The day after I did the same. None of them was greatly changed, simply slightly older; but every family was busy preparing for "the sacrifice." This is the great end-of-year ceremony in Luchen, when people reverently welcome the God of Fortune and solicit good fortune for the coming year. They kill chickens and geese and buy pork, scouring and scrubbing until all the women's arms turn red with cold in the water, some of them still wearing twisted silver bracelets. After the meat is cooked some chopsticks are thrust into it at random, and this is called the "offering." It is set out at dawn when incense and candles are lit, and they reverently invite the God of Fortune to come and partake of the offering. Only men can be worshippers, and after the sacrifice they naturally continue to let off firecrackers as before. This happens every year, in every family, provided only they can afford to buy the offering and firecrackers; so this year they naturally followed the old custom.

The day grew overcast and in the afternoon it actually started to snow, the biggest snow-flakes as large as cherry blossom petals, fluttering all about the sky; and this combined with the smoke and air of activity to make Luchen appear in a ferment. When I returned to my uncle's study the roof of the house was already white with snow and the room also appeared brighter, lighting up very clearly the great red stone rubbing of the character for Longevity hanging on the wall, written by the Taoist saint Chen Tuan.

One of a pair of scrolls had fallen down and was lying loosely rolled up on the long table, but the other was still hanging there, bearing the words: "With understanding and tranquil mind." Idly, I went to turn over the books on the table beneath the window, but all I could find was a pile of what looked like an incomplete set of *Kang Hsi's Dictionary,* a volume of Chiang Yung's *Philosophical Writings* and a volume of *Commentaries on the Four Books.** At all events I made up my mind to leave the next day.

Besides, the very thought of my meeting with Hsiang Lin's wife the day before made me uncomfortable. It had happened in the afternoon. I had been visiting a friend at the east of the town, and as I came out I met her by the river; and seeing the way she fastened her eyes on me, I knew very well she was going to accost me. Of all the people I had seen this time at Luchen none had changed as much as she: her hair, which had been streaked with white five years before, was now completely white, quite unlike someone in her forties. Her face was fearfully thin and dark in its sallowness, and had moreover lost its former expression of sadness, looking as if carved out of wood. There was only the occasional flicker of her eyes to show that she was still a living creature. In one hand she carried a wicker basket, in which was a broken bowl, empty; in the other hand she held a bamboo pole longer than herself, split at one end: it was clear that she had become a beggar.

I stood still, waiting for her to come and ask for money.

"You have come back?" she asked me first.

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* Confucian classics.

"Yes."

"That is very good. You are a scholar, and have also travelled too and seen a lot. I just want to ask you something." Her lustreless eyes suddenly gleamed.

I could never have guessed that she would talk to me like this, so I stood there in astonishment.

"It is this." She drew two paces nearer, lowered her voice and whispered very confidentially: "After a person dies, does he turn into a ghost or not?"

I was seized with foreboding, seeing her fixing me with her eyes, and felt a shiver run down my spine and more nervousness than when an unexpected examination is sprung on one at school, and the teacher insists on standing by one's side. Personally, I had never troubled about the question of the existence of spirits in the least; but in this emergency how should I answer her? Hesitating for a moment, I thought: "The people here traditionally believe in spirits, yet she, she seems to be sceptical—perhaps it would be better to say she hopes: hopes that there is immortality and yet hopes that there is not. Why increase the sufferings of the wretched? To give her something to look forward to, it would be better to say there is."

"There may be, I think," I thereupon said haltingly.

"Then, there must also be a Hell?"

"What, Hell?" Greatly startled, I could only try to evade the question. "Hell? According to reason there should be one too—but not necessarily. Who cares about it anyway? . . ."

"Then people of one family who have died will all see each other again?"

"Well, as to whether they will see each other again or not. . . ." I realized now that I was still a complete fool; all my hesitation and reflection had been unable to stand up to three questions. Immediately I lost confidence and wanted to say the exact opposite of what I had told her before. "In this case, as a matter of fact, I am not sure. Actually, regarding the question of ghosts, I am not sure either."

In order to avoid further importunate questions, I walked off, and beat a hasty retreat to my uncle's house, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. I thought to myself: "Could my answer prove dangerous to her? Probably it is just that when other people are celebrating she feels lonely by herself, but could there be any other reason? Could she have had some premonition? If there is any other reason, and something happens as a result, then my answer should be held responsible to a certain extent." Finally, however, I ended by laughing at myself, thinking that such a chance meeting could have no great significance, and yet I was taking it so to heart; no wonder certain educationalists called me a neurotic case. Moreover I had distinctly said, "I am not sure," contradicting my previous answer, so even if anything should happen, it would have nothing at all to do with me.

"I am not sure," is a most useful phrase.

Inexperienced and rash young men often take it upon themselves to solve people's problems for them or choose doctors for them, and if by any chance things turn out badly, they are probably held to blame; but just by using this phrase "I am not sure," in conclusion, one can free oneself of all responsibility. At this time I felt even more strongly the necessity for such a phrase, since even in speaking with a beggar woman there was no dispensing with it.

However, I continued to feel uncomfortable, and even after a night's rest my mind kept running on this, as if I had a premonition of some untoward development. In that oppressive snowy weather, in the gloomy study, this discomfort kept increasing. It would be better to leave: I should go back to town the next day. The boiled shark's fins in the Fu Hsing Restaurant used to be a dollar for a large dish, cheap and delicious, and I wondered if it had increased in price or not. Although the friends who had accompanied me in the old days had scattered, the shark's fins still had to be tasted, even if I was alone. At all events, I made up my mind to leave the next day. Because I had often had experience of things which I hoped would not happen and felt should not happen, yet which invariably did happen, I was desperately afraid this would prove another such case. And, indeed, strange things did begin to happen. Towards evening I heard the sound of people talking in the inner room, as if discussing something; but after a short time the conversation ceased, and I only heard my uncle as he walked out saying in a loud voice: "Not earlier nor later, but just at this time, sure sign of a bad character!"

I felt first astonished, then very uncomfortable, thinking these words must refer to me. I looked outside the door, but there was no one there. I contained myself with difficulty till their servant came in before dinner to brew a pot of tea, and only then did I have a chance to make some enquiries.

"With whom was Mr. Lu angry just now?" I asked.

"Why, still with Hsiang Lin's wife," the servant replied briefly.

"Hsiang Lin's wife? How was that?" I asked again.

"Dead."

"Dead?" My heart suddenly missed a beat; it seemed to give a jump, and probably my face changed colour too. But all the time he did not raise his head, so he was probably quite unaware of how I felt. Then I controlled myself, and asked further:

"When did she die?"

"When? Last night, or else today, I'm not sure."

"How did she die?"

"How did she die? Why, of poverty of course." He answered placidly, and still without having raised his head to look at me, went out.

However, my agitation was only short-lived, for now that something I had felt imminent had already taken place, I no longer had to take refuge in my "I'm not sure," or the servant's expression "dying of poverty" for comfort. My heart already felt lighter. Only from time to time did there still seem to be something weighing on it. Dinner was served, and my uncle accompanied me solemnly. I wanted to ask about Hsiang Lin's wife, but knew that although he had read, "Ghosts and spirits are properties of Nature,"* he had retained many superstitions, and on the eve of this sacrifice it was out of the question to mention anything like death or illness. In case of necessity one could use veiled allusions, but unfortunately I did not know how to, so although questions kept rising to the tip of my tongue, I had to bite them back. From his solemn expression I suddenly suspected that he looked on me as choosing not earlier nor later but just this time to come and trouble him, and that I was also a bad character, so, in order to set his mind at rest, I told him at once that I intended to leave Luchen the next day and go back to the city. He did not press me greatly to stay. So we quietly finished the meal.

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* A Confucian saying. The Confucians took a relatively rational view of spirits.

In winter the days are short, and now that it was snowing darkness already enveloped the whole town. Everybody was busy beneath the lamplight, but outside the windows was very quiet. Snow-flakes fell on the thickly piled snow, making one feel even more lonely. I sat by myself under the yellow gleam of the vegetable oil lamp and thought, "This poor woman, abandoned by people in the dust as a tiresome and worn-out toy, once left her own imprint in the dust, and those who enjoy life must have wondered at her for wishing to prolong her existence; but now at least she has been swept clear by eternity. Whether spirits exist or not I do not know; but in the present world when a meaningless existence ends, so that someone whom others are tired of seeing is no longer seen, it is just as well, both for the individual concerned and for others." I listened quietly to see if I could hear the snow falling outside the window, still pursuing this train of thought, until gradually I felt less ill at ease.

Yet fragments of her life, seen or heard before, now combined to form one whole.

She did not belong to Luchen. One year at the beginning of winter, when my uncle's family wanted to change their maidservant, Old Mrs. Wei, who acted as introducer, brought her in. Her hair was tied with white bands, she wore a black skirt, blue jacket and white bodice, and was about twenty-six, with a pale face but rosy cheeks. Old Mrs. Wei called her Hsiang Lin's wife, and said that she was a neighbour of her mother's family, and since her husband's death she had worked outside. My uncle knitted his brows and my aunt immediately understood that he disapproved of her because she was a widow. However, when Aunt saw how respectable she looked, with big strong feet and hands, and a meek expression, not saying a word but with every sign of being tractable and hard-working, she paid no attention to my uncle's frown, but kept her. During the period of probation she worked from morning till night, as if she found resting dull, and she was so strong that she could do a man's work; accordingly on the third day it was settled, and each month she was to have a salary of five hundred cash.

Everybody called her Hsiang Lin's wife. They did not ask her her own name, but since she was introduced by someone from Wei Village, who said she was a neighbour, presumably her name was also Wei. She was not very talkative, only answering when other people spoke to her, and her answers were brief. It was not until a dozen days or so had passed that they learned little by little that she still had a severe mother-in-law at home and a younger brother-in-law who was a woodcutter. Her husband, who had been a woodcutter too, had died in the spring. He had been ten years younger than she.* This little was all that people learned from her.

The days passed quickly, but she worked as hard as ever; she would eat anything, and did not spare herself. Everybody said that the maidservant engaged in Mr. Lu's house really got through more work than a hard-working man. At the end of the year she swept, mopped, killed chickens and geese and sat up to boil the sacrificial meat, single-handed, so the family did not have to hire extra help. Nevertheless, she, on her side, was satisfied; gradually the trace of a smile appeared at the corner of her mouth, and her face became whiter and plumper.

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* In country districts it used to be common for young women to be married to boys of ten or eleven. The bride's labour could then be exploited by her husband's family.

New Year was scarcely over when she came back from washing rice by the river looking pale, and said that she had just seen in the distance a man wandering on the opposite bank who looked very like her brother-in-law, and probably he had come to look for her. My aunt, much alarmed, made minute enquiries, but failed to get any further information. As soon as my uncle learned of it he frowned and said, "This is bad. She must have run away from her husband's family."

Before long this inference that she had run away was confirmed.

About a fortnight later, just as everybody was beginning to forget what had happened, Old Mrs. Wei suddenly called, bringing with her a woman in her thirties who, she said, was the maid's mother-in-law. Although the woman looked like a villager, she behaved with great self-possession and had a ready tongue in her head. After the usual polite remarks she apologized and said that she had come specially to take her daughter-in-law home, because there was a great deal to be done at the beginning of spring, and there were only old people and children at home, so that they were short-handed.

"Since it is her mother-in-law who wants her to go back, what is there to be said?" said my uncle.

Thereupon her wages were reckoned up. They amounted to one thousand seven hundred and fifty cash, all of which she had left with her mistress without using a single coin; and now my aunt gave the entire amount to her mother-in-law. The latter also took her clothes, thanked Mr. and Mrs. Lu and went out. By this time it was already noon.

"Oh, the rice! didn't Hsiang Lin's wife go to wash the rice?" my aunt suddenly exclaimed some time later. Probably she was rather hungry, so that she remembered lunch.

Thereupon everybody set about looking for the rice basket. My aunt went first to the kitchen, then to the hall, then to the bedroom; but not a trace of it was to be seen anywhere. My uncle went outside, but could not find it either; only when he went right up to the riverside did he see it, set down fair and square on the bank, with a bundle of vegetables at the side.

Some people there told him that a boat with a white awning had moored there in the morning, but since the awning covered the boat completely they did not know who was inside, and before this incident no one had paid any attention to it. But when Hsiang Lin's wife came out to wash rice and was just kneeling down, two men looking like country people suddenly jumped off the boat and seizing hold of her carried her on board. Hsiang Lin's wife gave several shouts and cries, but soon became silent, probably they had used something to stop her mouth. Then two women walked up, one of them a stranger and the other Old Mrs. Wei. When these people tried to peep into the boat they could not see very clearly, but she seemed to be lying bound on the floor of the boat.

"Disgraceful! Still . . ." said my uncle.

That day my aunt cooked the midday meal herself, and my cousin Ah Niu lit the fire.

After lunch Old Mrs. Wei came again.

"Disgraceful!" said my uncle.

"What is the meaning of this? How dare you come here again!" My aunt, who was washing dishes, started scolding as soon as she saw her. "You recommended her yourself, and then plotted to have her carried off, causing all this upstir. What will people think of you? Are you trying to make a laughing-stock of our family?"

"Oh dear, oh dear, I was really taken in. Now I have come specially to clear this business up. When she came and asked me to find her work, how was I to know that she had come without her mother-in-law's consent? I am very sorry, Mr. Lu, Mrs. Lu. Because I am so old and foolish and careless I have offended my patrons. However, it is lucky for me that your family is always so generous and kind, and unwilling to be hard on your inferiors. This time I shall certainly find you someone good to make up for my mistake."

"Still . . ." said my uncle.

Thereupon Hsiang Lin's wife's business was concluded, and before long it was also forgotten.

Only my aunt, because the maidservants taken on afterwards were all lazy or fond of stealing food, or else both lazy and fond of stealing food, with not a good one in the lot, still often spoke of Hsiang Lin's wife. On such occasions she would always say to herself, "I wonder what has become of her now?" meaning that she would like to have her back. But by the following New Year she too gave up hope.

The New Year's holiday was nearly over when Old Mrs. Wei, already half tipsy, came to pay her respects, and said it was because she had been back to the

Wei Village to visit her mother's family and stayed a few days that she had come late. During the course of conversation they naturally came to speak of Hsiang Lin's wife.

"She?" said Mrs. Wei cheerfully. "She is in luck now. When her mother-in-law dragged her home, she had already promised her to the sixth son of the Ho family in Ho Village; so not long after she reached home they put her in the bridal chair and sent her off."

"Gracious! What a mother-in-law!" exclaimed my aunt in amazement.

"Gracious, madam! You really talk like a great lady. We country folk, poor women, think nothing of that. She still had a younger brother-in-law who had to get married. And if they hadn't found her a husband, where would they have got the money for his wedding?* But her mother-in-law is a clever and capable woman, who knows how to drive a good bargain, so she married her off into the mountain. If she had married her to someone in the same village, she wouldn't have got so much money; but very few women are willing to marry someone living in the depth of the mountain, so that she got eighty thousand cash. Now the second son has got married, only costing her fifty thousand for the presents, and apart from the wedding expenses she has still over ten thousand left. Just think, doesn't this show she knows how to drive a good bargain? . . ."

"But was Hsiang Lin's wife willing?"

"It wasn't a question of being willing or not. Of course anyone would have protested. But they just tied her up with a rope, stuffed her into the bridal chair, carried her to the man's house, put on the bridal head-dress, performed the ceremony in the hall and locked them into their room; and that was that. But Hsiang Lin's wife is quite a character. I heard she really put up a great struggle, and everybody said it must be because she had worked in a scholar's family that she was different from other people. You and I, madam, have seen a great deal. When widows remarry, some cry and shout, some threaten to commit suicide, some when they have been carried to the man's house won't go through the ceremony, and some even smash the wedding candlesticks. But Hsiang Lin's wife was different from the rest. They said she shouted and cursed all the way, so that by the time they had carried her to Ho Village she was completely hoarse. When they dragged her out of the chair, although the two chair-bearers and her young brother-in-law used all their strength, they couldn't force her to go through the ceremony. As soon as they were slightly careless and loosened their grip—gracious Buddha!—she threw herself against a corner of the table and knocked a big hole in her head. The blood poured out, and although they used two handfuls of incense ashes and bandaged her with two pieces of red cloth, they still couldn't stop the bleeding. Finally it took all of them together to get her shut up with her husband in the bridal chamber, where she went on cursing. Gracious me, it was really dreadful!" She shook her head, cast down her eyes and said no more.

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* In feudal China, because of the labour value of the peasant woman, the man's family virtually bought the wife.

"And after that what happened?" asked my aunt.

"They said the next day she still didn't get up," said Old Mrs. Wei, raising her eyes.

"And after?"

"After? She got up. At the end of the year she had a baby, a boy, who was two this New Year. These few days when I was at home some people went to Ho Village, and when they came back they said they had seen her and her son, and that both mother and baby are fat. There is no mother-in-law over her, the man is a strong fellow who can earn a living, and the house is their own. Well, well, she is really in luck."

After this even my aunt gave up talking of Hsiang Lin's wife.

But one autumn, about two years after this news of the good fortune of Hsiang Lin's wife, she herself actually reappeared at the threshold of my uncle's house. On the table she placed a round bulb-shaped basket, and under the eaves a small roll of bedding. Her hair was still wrapped in white bands, and she wore a black skirt, blue jacket and white bodice. But her face was sallow and her two cheeks had lost their ruddy colour; she kept her eyes downcast, and her eyes, with their tear-stained rims, were not as bright as formerly. Just as before, it was Old Mrs. Wei, looking very benevolent, who brought her in, and who explained at length to my aunt:

"It was really a bolt from the blue. Her husband was so strong, nobody could have guessed that he would die of typhoid fever. First he seemed better, but then he ate a bowl of cold rice and the sickness came back. Luckily she had the boy, and she can work, whether it is chopping wood, picking tea-leaves or feeding silkworms; so that at first she was able to carry on. But then who could know that the child would also be carried off by a wolf? Although it was nearly the end of spring, still wolves came to the village—how could anyone have guessed that? Now she is all on her own. Her brother-in-law came to take the house, and turned her out; so she has really no way open to her but to come and ask help from her former mistress. Luckily this time there is nobody to stop her, and fortunately you happen to be wanting a new servant, so I have brought her here; I think someone who is used to your ways is really much better than a new hand. . . ."

"I was really stupid, really. . . ." Hsiang Lin's wife raised her listless eyes to say. "I only knew that when it snows the wild beasts in the glen have nothing to eat and may come to the villages; I didn't know that in spring they could come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and called our Ah Mao to go and sit at the threshold and shell the beans. He was very obedient and always did as I told him: he went out. Then I chopped wood at the back of the house and washed the rice, and when the rice was in the pan and I wanted to boil the beans I called Ah Mao, but there was no answer; and when I went out to look, all I could see was beans scattered on the ground, but no Ah Mao. He never went to other families to play; and in fact at each place that I went to ask, there was no sign of him. I became desperate, and sent people out to look for him. Only in the afternoon, after looking everywhere else, did they go to look in the glen, and saw one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. 'That's bad,' they said, 'he must have met a wolf.' And sure enough when they went further in there he was, lying in the wolf's lair, with all his entrails already eaten away, his hand still tightly clutching that little basket. . . ." At this point she started crying, and was unable to complete the sentence.

My aunt had been undecided at first, but after hearing this story her eyes were rather red. After thinking for a moment she told her to take the round basket and bedding into the servants' quarters. Old Mrs. Wei, as if relieved of a great burden, heaved a long sigh; Hsiang Lin's wife looked a little more at ease than when first she came, and without having to be told the way, she meekly took away her bedding. From this time onward she worked again as maidservant in Luchen.

Everybody still called her Hsiang Lin's wife.

However, she had changed a great deal. She had not been there more than three days before her master and mistress realized that she was not as quick on her feet as before, her memory was much worse, and her impassive face never showed the least trace of a smile; thus my aunt already expressed herself very far from satisfied. When the woman first arrived, although my uncle frowned as before, still, on account of their invariable difficulty in finding servants, he did not object very strongly, only secretly warning my aunt that although such people may seem very pitiful, they are a bad moral influence; thus although it would be all right for her to do ordinary work she must not join in the preparations for sacrifice, and they would have to prepare all the dishes themselves, for otherwise they would be unclean and the ancestors would not accept them.

The most important event in my uncle's household was ancestral sacrifice, and formerly this had been Hsiang Lin's wife's busiest time; but now she had nothing to do. When the table was placed in the centre of the hall and the curtain fastened, she still remembered how to set out the winecups and chopsticks in the old way.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, put those down! I'll do it!" my aunt said hastily.

She sheepishly withdrew her hand and went to get the candlesticks.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, put those down. I'll fetch them," my aunt put in hastily again.

After walking round several times without finding anything to do, she could only go hesitantly away. All she did that day was to sit by the stove and light the fire.

The people in the town still called her Hsiang Lin's wife, but in a different tone from before; and although they talked to her still, their manner was colder. She did not mind this in the least, only, looking straight in front of her, she would tell everybody her story, which night or day was never out of her mind.

"I was really stupid, really," she would say. "I only knew that when it snows the wild beasts in the glen have nothing to eat and may come to the villages; I didn't know that in spring they could come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and called our Ah Mao to go and sit at the threshold and shell them. He was very obedient and always did as I told him: he went out. Then I chopped wood at the back of the house and washed the rice, and when the rice was in the pan and I wanted to boil the beans I called Ah Mao, but there was no answer; and when I went out to look, all I could see was beans scattered on the ground, but no Ah Mao. He never went to other families to play; and in fact at each place that I went to ask, there was no sign of him. I became desperate, and sent people out to look for him. Only in the afternoon, after looking everywhere else, did they go to look in the glen, and found one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. Everybody said, 'That finishes it: he must have met a wolf.' And sure enough when they went in further there he was, lying in the wolf's lair, with all his entrails eaten away, his poor little hand still tightly clutching that small basket. . . ." At this point she would start crying and her voice would trail away.

This story was rather effective, and when men heard it they often stopped smiling and walked away disconcerted, while the women not only seemed to forgive her but their faces immediately lost their contemptuous look and they added their tears to hers. There were some old women who had not heard her speaking in the street, who went specially to look for her, wanting to hear her sad story. When her voice trailed away and she started to cry, then they joined in, shedding the tears which had gathered in their eyes; after which they sighed, and went away satisfied, exchanging comments.

Then she asked nothing better than to repeat her sad story to people again and again, often drawing three or four people to listen. But before long everybody knew it by heart, until even in the eyes of the most kindly, Buddha-fearing old ladies not a trace of tears could be seen. Later almost everyone in the market could recite her story, and it bored and exasperated them to hear it.

"I was really stupid, really. . ." she would begin.

"Yes, you only knew that in snowy weather the wild beasts in the mountains had nothing to eat and might come down to the villages." They immediately cut short her recital and walked away.

She would stand there with open mouth, looking at them with a dazed expression, and then go away too, as if she also felt disconcerted. But she still brooded over it, hoping from other topics such as small baskets, beans and other people's children, to lead up to the story of her Ah Mao. If she saw a child of two or three, she would say, "Oh dear, if my Ah Mao were still alive, he would be just so big. . . ."

Children seeing the look in her eyes would take fright, and clutching the hems of their mothers' clothes try to tug them away. Thereupon she would be left by herself again, and finally walk away disconcerted. Later everybody knew what she was like, and it only needed a child present for them to ask her with a sarcastic smile, "Hsiang Lin's Wife, if your Ah Mao were alive, wouldn't he be just as big as that?"

She probably did not realize that her story, after having been turned over and tasted by people for so many days, had long since become stale, only exciting disgust and contempt; but from the way people smiled she seemed to know that they were cold and sarcastic, and that there was no need for her to say any more. She would simply look at them, not answering a word.

In Luchen people celebrate New Year in a big way: from the twentieth day of the twelfth month onwards people start getting busy. This time my uncle's household found it necessary to hire a temporary manservant, but there was still a great deal to do, so they also called in another maidservant, Liu Ma, to help. Chickens and geese had to be killed; but Liu Ma was a devout woman who abstained from meat, did not kill living things, and would only wash the sacrificial dishes. Hsiang Lin's wife, apart from lighting the fire, had nothing else to do, and rested, sitting there watching Liu Ma wash the sacrificial dishes. A light snow began to fall.

"Dear me, I was really stupid," said Hsiang Lin's wife, as if to herself, looking at the sky and sighing.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, there you go again," said Liu Ma, looking at her impatiently. "I ask you: that wound on your forehead, wasn't it then you got it?"

"Uh, huh," she answered vaguely.

"Let me ask you: what made you willing after all?"

"Me?"

"Yes. What I think is, you must have been willing; otherwise. . . ."

"Oh dear, you don't know how strong he was."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe he was so strong that you really couldn't keep him off. You must have been willing, only you put the blame on his being so strong."

"Oh dear, you . . . you try for yourself and see," she smiled.

Liu Ma's lined face broke into a smile too, making it wrinkled like a walnut; her small beady eyes swept Hsiang Lin's wife's forehead and fastened on her eyes. Hsiang Lin's wife, as if rather embarrassed, at once stopped smiling, averted her eyes and looked at the snow-flakes.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, that was really a bad bargain," said Liu Ma mysteriously. "If you had either held out more or else knocked yourself to death, it would have been better. As it is, after living with your second husband for less than two years, you are guilty of a great crime. You think; when you go down to the lower world in future, these two men's ghosts will still want to fight over you. To which will you go? The King of Hell will have no choice but to cut you in two and divide you between them, I think. Really. . . ."

Then terror showed in her face. This was something she had never heard in the mountains.

"I think you had better take precautions beforehand. You go to the Tutelary God's Temple and buy a threshold to be your substitute, so that thousands of people can walk over it, and kneel there, in order to atone for your sins in this life and to avoid torment after death."

At the time Hsiang Lin's wife said nothing, but she must have taken it to heart, for the next morning when she got up there were dark circles beneath her eyes. And after breakfast she went to the Tutelary God's Temple at the west end of the village, and asked to buy a threshold. The temple priests would not agree at first, and only when she shed tears did they give a grudging consent. The price was twelve thousand cash.

She had long since given up talking to people, because Ah Mao's story had been received with such contempt; but news of her conversation with Liu Ma that day spread, and many people took a fresh interest in her and came again to tease her into talking. As for the subject, that had naturally changed to deal with the wound on her forehead.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, I ask you: what made you willing after all that time?" one would cry.

"Oh, what a pity, to have had this knock for nothing," another looking at her scar would agree.

Probably she knew from their smiles and tone of voice that they were making fun of her, so she always looked steadily at them without saying a word, and finally did not even turn her head. All day long she kept her lips tightly closed, bearing on her head the scar which everyone considered a mark of shame, silently hurrying down the streets, sweeping the floor, washing vegetables, preparing rice. Only after nearly a year did she take from my aunt her wages which had been accumulating, which she changed for twelve silver dollars, and asking for leave she went to the west end of the town. But in less time than it takes for a meal she was back again, looking much comforted, and with an unaccustomed light in her eyes; and she told my aunt happily that she had bought a threshold in the Tutelary God's Temple.

When the time came for the winter sacrifice, she worked harder than ever, and seeing my aunt take out the sacrificial utensils and carry the table with Ah Niu into the middle of the hall, she went confidently to fetch the winecups and chopsticks.

"You put them down, Hsiang Lin's Wife!" My aunt called out hastily in a loud voice.

She withdrew her hand as if she had been scorched, while at the same time her face turned ashen-grey, and instead of going to fetch the candlesticks she just stood there dazed. Only when my uncle came to burn incense and told her to go, did she walk away. This time the change in her was very great, for the next day not only were her eyes sunken, but even her spirit seemed broken. Moreover she became very timid, not only afraid of the dark but also of shadows, so that at the sight of anyone, even her own master or mistress, she would look as frightened as a little mouse that has come out of its hole in the daytime. For the rest, she would sit stupidly, like a wooden statue. In less than half a year her hair began to turn grey, and her memory became much worse, reaching a point when she was constantly forgetting to go and prepare the rice.

"What has come over Hsiang Lin's wife? It would really have been better not to have kept her that time." My aunt would sometimes speak like this in front of her, as if to warn her.

However she remained this way, so that it was impossible to see any hope of her improving. Then they decided to get rid of her and tell her to go back to Old Mrs. Wei. While I was at Luchen they were still only talking of this; but judging by what happened later, it is evident that this was what they must have done. But whether after leaving my uncle's household she became a beggar, or whether she went first to Old Mrs. Wei's house and later became a beggar, I do not know.

I give this account because I was woken up by firecrackers exploding noisily close at hand, saw the glow of yellow lanterns as large as beans and heard the splutter of fireworks, as my uncle's household celebrated the sacrifice. I knew that it was nearly dawn. I felt bewildered, hearing as in a dream the confused continuous sound of distant crackers which seemed to form one dense cloud of noise in the sky, joining with the whirling snow-flakes to envelop the whole town. Enveloped in this medley of sound, relaxed and at ease, the doubt which had preyed on me from dawn to early night was swept clean away by the atmosphere of celebration, and I only felt that the saints of heaven and earth had accepted the sacrifice and incense and were all reeling with intoxication in the sky, preparing to give the people of Luchen boundless good fortune.

February 7, 1924

IN THE WINE SHOP

DURING my travels from the North to the South-east I made a detour to visit my home, then to S—. This town is only about ten miles from my native place, and can be reached in less than half a day by a small boat. I had taught school here for a year. In the depth of winter, after snow, the landscape was chilly. Indolence and nostalgia combined finally made me put up for a short time in Lo Szu Hotel—a hotel which had not been there before. The town was small. I looked for several old colleagues I thought I might find, but not one was there, having long since gone their different ways. And when I passed the gate of the school, that too had changed its name and appearance, making me feel quite a stranger. In less than two hours my enthusiasm had waned, and I rather reproached myself for coming.

The hotel in which I stayed let rooms but did not supply meals; rice and dishes could be ordered from outside, but they were quite unpalatable, tasting like mud. Outside the window was only a stained and spotted wall, covered with withered moss. Above was the slaty sky, dead white without any colouring; moreover a light flurry of snow had begun to fall. I had had a poor lunch to begin with, and had nothing to do to while away the time, so quite naturally

I thought of a small wine shop I had known very well in the old days, called "One Barrel House," which, I reckoned, could not be far from the hotel. I immediately locked the door of my room and set out for the wine shop. Actually all I wanted was to escape the boredom of my stay, I did not really want to drink. "One Barrel House" was still there, its narrow, mouldering shop front and dilapidated signboard unchanged. But from the accountant down to the waiter there was not a single person I knew—in "One Barrel House" too I had become a complete stranger. Still I walked up the familiar flight of stairs in the corner of the room, and so reached the little upper storey. Up here there were still the same five small wooden tables, unchanged. Only the back window, which had originally had a wooden lattice, had been fitted with glass panes.

"A pint of yellow wine. Dishes? Ten slices of fried beancurd, with plenty of pepper sauce!"

As I gave the order to the waiter who had come up with me, I walked to the back and sat down at the table by the window. This upstairs room was absolutely empty, enabling me to take possession of the best seat from which one could look out onto the deserted courtyard beneath. The courtyard probably did not belong to the wine shop. I had looked out at it many times before in the past, sometimes too in snowy weather. But now, to eyes accustomed to the North, the sight was sufficiently striking: several old plum trees were actually in full blossom to rival the snow, as if entirely oblivious of winter; while beside the crumbling pavilion there was still a camellia with a dozen crimson blossoms standing out against its thick, dark green foliage, blazing in the snow as bright as fire, indignant and arrogant, as if despising the wanderer's wanderlust. And then I suddenly remembered the moistness of the heaped snow here, clinging, glistening and shining, quite unlike the dry northern snow which, when a high wind blows, will fly up and fill the sky like mist. . . .

"Your wine, sir . . ." said the waiter carelessly, and put down the cup, chopsticks, wine pot and dish. The wine had come. I turned to the table, set right the utensils and filled my cup. I felt that the North was certainly not my home, and yet when I came South I could only count as a stranger. The dry snow up there, which flew like powder, and the soft snow here, which clung lingeringly, both seemed equally alien to me. In a slightly melancholy mood, I took a leisurely sip of wine. The wine was quite pure, the fried beancurd was also excellently cooked. The only pity was that the pepper sauce was too thin but then the people of S— had never understood pungent flavours.

Probably because it was only afternoon, the place had none of the atmosphere of a wine shop. I had already drunk three cups of wine, but apart from myself there were still only four empty wooden tables in the place. Looking at the deserted courtyard I began to feel lonely, yet I did not want any other customers to come up. Therefore when now and then I heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs I could not help feeling displeased, and was relieved to find it was only the waiter. And so I drank another two cups of wine.

"This time it must be a customer," I thought, for the footsteps sounded much slower than those of the waiter. When I judged that he must be at the top of the stairs, I raised my head rather apprehensively to look at this unwelcome company, then gave a start and stood up. I could never have guessed that here of all places I should unexpectedly meet a friend—if such he would still allow me to call him. The newcomer was an old classmate who had been my colleague when I was a teacher and although he had changed a great deal I knew him as soon as I saw him. Only he had become much slower in his movements, very unlike the nimble and active Lu Wei-fu of the old days.

"Ah, Wei-fu, is it you? I never expected to meet you here."

"Oh, it's you? Neither did I ever. . . ."

I urged him to join me, but only after some hesitation did he seem willing to sit down. I thought this very strange, and felt rather hurt and displeased. When one looked closely at him he had still the same disorderly hair and pale oblong face, but he was thinner. He looked very quiet, or perhaps dispirited, and his eyes beneath their thick black brows had lost their alertness; but when he looked slowly around in the direction of the deserted courtyard he suddenly flashed out one of those piercing looks which I had seen so often at school.

"Well," I said cheerfully but somewhat awkwardly, "we have not seen each other now for more than ten years. I heard long ago that you were at Tsinan, but I was so wretchedly lazy I never wrote. . . ."

"I was just the same. I have been at Taiyuan for more than two years now, with my mother. When I came back to fetch her I learned that you had already left, left for good and all."

"What are you doing at Taiyuan?" I asked.

"Teaching in the family of a fellow provincial."

"And before that?"

"Before that?" He took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it and put it in his mouth, watching the smoke he puffed out, then said reflectively, "Simply futile work, equivalent to doing nothing at all."

He also asked what had happened to me since we separated. I gave him a rough idea, at the same time calling the waiter to bring a cup and chopsticks, so that he could first share my wine, after which we would have another two pints heated. We also ordered dishes. In the past we had never stood on ceremony, but now we began to be so formal no one could say which dish was chosen by whom, and finally we fixed on four suggested by the waiter: fried beans, cold meat, fried beancurd, fried fish.

"As soon as I came back I knew I was a fool." Holding his cigarette in one hand and the winecup in the other, he spoke with a bitter smile. "When I was young and saw bees or flies stopping in one place, I would find some means to frighten them so that they flew off, but after flying in a small circle they would come back again to stop in the same place; and I thought this really very foolish, and also pathetic. But I didn't think that I would have flown back too myself, after only flying in a small circle. And I didn't think you would have come back either. Couldn't you have flown a little further?"

"That's difficult to say. Probably I too have simply flown in a small circle." I also spoke with a rather bitter smile. "But why did you fly back?"

"For something quite futile." In one gulp he emptied his cup, then took several pulls at his cigarette, and opened his eyes a little wider. "Futile—but you may as well hear about it."

The waiter brought up the freshly heated wine and dishes, and set them on the table. The upstairs room, warmed with smoke and the fragrance of fried beancurd, seemed to become more cheerful, while outside the snow fell still more thickly.

"Perhaps you knew before," he went on, "I had a little brother who died when he was three, and was buried in the country here. I can't even remember clearly what he looked like, but I have heard my mother say he was a very lovable child, and very fond of me. Even now it brings tears to her eyes to speak of him. This spring an elder cousin wrote to tell us that the ground beside his grave was gradually being swamped, and he was afraid before long it would slip into the river: we should go at once and do something about it. As soon as my mother knew this, she became very upset, and couldn't sleep for several nights—she can read letters herself. But what could I do? I had no money, no time: there was nothing that could be done. Only now, by taking advantage of my New Year's holiday, have I been able to come South to move his grave." He drained another cup of wine, looked out of the window and exclaimed: "Could you find anything like this up North? Flowers in thick snow, and beneath the snow not frozen. So the day before yesterday I bought a small coffin, because I reckoned that the one under the ground must have rotted long ago—I took cotton and bedding, hired four workmen, and went into the country to move his grave. At the time I suddenly felt very happy, eager to dig up the grave, eager to see the body of the little brother who had been so fond of me: this was a new sensation for me. When we reached the grave, sure enough, the river water was encroaching on it and already only about two feet away. The poor grave had not had any earth added to it for two years, and had sunk in. I stood in the snow, firmly pointed it out to the workmen, and said: 'Dig it up!'

"I really am a commonplace fellow. I felt that my voice at this juncture was rather unnatural, and that this order was the greatest I had given in all my life. But the workmen didn't find it at all strange, and simply set to work to dig. When they had reached the enclosure I had a look, and indeed the wood of the coffin had rotted almost completely away, leaving only a heap of splinters and small fragments of wood. My heart beat faster and I set these aside myself very carefully, wanting to see my little brother. However, I was taken by surprise. Bedding, clothes, skeleton, all had gone! I thought: 'These have all rotted away, but I always heard that the most difficult substance to rot is hair; perhaps there is still some hair.' So I bent down and looked carefully in the mud where the pillow should have been, but there was none. Not a trace remained."

I suddenly noticed that the rims of his eyes had become rather red, but realized at once that this was the effect of the wine. He had scarcely touched the dishes, only drinking incessantly, so that he had already drunk more than one pint, and his looks and gestures had all become more vigorous, gradually resembling the Lu Wei-fu I had known. I called the waiter to heat two more pints of wine, then turned back and, taking my winecup, face to face with him, I listened in silence.

"Actually it need not really have been moved again; I had only to level the ground, sell the coffin, and that would have been the end of it. Although there would have been something rather singular in my going to sell the coffin, still, if the price were low enough the shop from which I bought it would have taken it, and at least I could have saved a little money for wine. But I didn't do so. I still spread out the bedding, wrapped up in cotton some of the clay where his body had been, covered it up, put it in the new coffin, moved it to the grave where my father is buried, and buried it beside him. And because I used bricks for an enclosure of the coffin I was busy again most of yesterday, supervising the work. But in this way I can count the affair ended, at least enough to deceive my mother and set her mind at rest. Well, well, you look at me like that. Are you blaming me for being too changed? Yes, I still remember the time when we went together to the Tutelary God's Temple to pull off the images' beards, how all day long we used to discuss methods of revolutionizing China until we even came to blows. But now I am like this, fond of appearances, of compromise. Sometimes I think: 'If my old friends were to see me now, probably they would no longer acknowledge me as a friend.' But this is what I am like now."

He took out another cigarette, put it in his mouth and lit it.

"Judging by your expression, you still seem to have hope for me. Naturally I am much more obtuse than before, but there are still some things I realize. This makes me grateful to you, at the same time rather uneasy. I am afraid I am only letting down the old friends who even now still have some hope for me. . . ." He stopped and took a few puffs of smoke before going on slowly: "Only today, just before coming to this 'One Barrel House,' I did something futile, and yet it was also something I was glad to do. My former neighbour on the east side was called Chang Fu. He was a boatman. He had a daughter called Ah Shun, and when you came to my house in those days you might have seen her; but you certainly wouldn't have paid any attention to her, because she was small then. Nor did she grow up to be pretty, just having an ordinary thin oval face and pale skin. Only her eyes were unusually large, with very long lashes, and the whites were as clear as a cloudless night sky—I mean the cloudless sky of the North when there is no wind; here it is not so clear. She was very capable. She lost her mother when she was in her teens, and it was her job to look after a small brother and sister; also she had to wait on her father, and all this she did very competently. She was economical too, so that the family gradually grew better off. There was scarcely a neighbour who did not praise her, and even Chang Fu often expressed his appreciation. When I was leaving on my journey this time, my mother remembered her—old people's memories are so long. She recalled that in the past Ah Shun saw someone wearing red artificial flowers in her hair, and wanted a spray for herself, and when she couldn't get one she cried nearly all night, so that she was beaten by her father, and her eyes remained red and swollen for two or three days. These red flowers came from another province, and couldn't be bought even in S—, so how could she ever hope to have any? Since I was coming South this time, my mother told me to buy two sprays to give her.

"Far from feeling vexed at this commission, I was actually delighted. For I was really glad to do something for Ah Shun. The year before last, when I came back to fetch my mother, one day when Chang Fu was at home I happened to start chatting with him. He wanted to invite me to take some refreshment made of buckwheat flour, telling me that they added white sugar to it. You see, a boatman who could keep white sugar in his house was obviously not poor, and must eat very well. I let myself be persuaded and accepted, but begged that they would only give me a small bowl. And he quite understood, so he ordered Ah Shun: 'These scholars have no appetite. You use a small bowl, but add more sugar!' However when she had prepared the concoction and brought it in, I gave a start, for it was a large bowl, enough for me to eat all day. Compared with Chang Fu's bowl, it is true, it did appear small. In all my life I had never eaten this buckwheat concoction, and now that I tasted it, it was really unpalatable, but extremely sweet. I carelessly swallowed a few mouthfuls, and was thinking to eat no more when I happened to catch a glimpse of Ah Shun standing far off in one corner of the room, and had not the heart to put down my chopsticks. I saw in her face both hope and fear—fear, no doubt, that she had prepared it badly, and hope that we would find it to our liking. I knew that if I left most of my bowl she would be very disappointed. So I screwed up my courage, opened wide my mouth and shovelled it down, eating almost as fast as Chang Fu. It was then that I learned the agony of forcing oneself to eat; I remember when I was a child and had to finish a bowl of brown sugar mixed with medicine for worms I experienced the same difficulty. However I felt no resentment, because her half suppressed smile of satisfaction when she came to take away our empty bowls repaid me amply for all my discomfort. So that night, although indigestion kept me from sleeping well and I had a series of nightmares, I still wished her a lifetime of happiness, and hoped the world would change for the better for her sake. But such thoughts were only the traces of my dreams in the old days. The next instant I laughed at myself, and then forgot them.

"I had not known before that she had been beaten on account of a spray of artificial flowers, but when my mother spoke of it I remembered the buckwheat flour incident, and became unaccountably diligent. First I made a search in Taiyuan, but none of the shops had them. It was only when I went to Tsinan. . . ."

There was a rustle outside the window, as a pile of snow slipped down from the camellia which it had been bending beneath its weight; then the branches of the tree straightened themselves, showing even more clearly their dark thick foliage and blood-red flowers. The slate colour of the sky increased in intensity. Small sparrows chirped, probably because evening was near, and since the ground was covered with snow they could find nothing to eat and all went early to their nests to sleep.

"It was only when I went to Tsinan," he looked out of the window for a moment, turned back and drained a cup of wine, took several puffs at his cigarette, and went on: "Only then did I buy the artificial flowers. I didn't know whether those she had been beaten for were this kind or not; but at least these were also made of velvet. I didn't know either whether she liked a deep or a light colour, so I bought one spray of red, one spray of pink, and brought them both here.

"Just this afternoon, as soon as I had finished lunch, I went to see Chang Fu, having specially stayed an extra day for this. His house was there all right, only looking rather gloomy; or perhaps this was no more than my imagination. His son and second daughter—Ah Chao—were both standing at the gate, bigger. Ah Chao had grown up quite different from her sister, looking very plain; but when she saw me come up to their house, she ran quickly inside. When I asked the little boy, I found that Chang Fu was not at home. 'And your elder sister?' At once he stared at me wide-eyed, and asked me what I wanted her for; moreover he seemed very fierce, as if he wanted to attack me. Hesitantly I walked away. Nowadays I am like that. . . .

"You can have no idea how much more afraid I am of calling on people than I used to be. Because I know very well how unwelcome I am, so that I even dislike myself, and knowing this why should I inflict myself on other people? But this time this errand of mine had to be carried out, so after thinking it over I went back to the firewood shop almost opposite their house. The shopkeeper's mother, Old Mrs. Fa, was there at least, and still recognized me, and actually asked me into the shop to sit down. After an exchange of polite remarks I told her why I had come back to S— and was looking for Chang Fu. I had not expected her to heave a sigh and say:

" 'What a pity Ah Shun had not the good luck to wear these artificial flowers.'

"Then she told me the whole story, saying, 'It was probably last spring that she began to look pale and thin, and later she would often start crying suddenly, and if you asked her why, she wouldn't say. Sometimes she even cried all night, crying until Chang Fu couldn't help losing his temper and scolding her, saying she had waited too long to marry and had gone mad. But when autumn came, first she only had a slight cold, and then she took to her bed, and after that she never got up again. Only a few days before she died, she told Chang Fu that she had long ago become like her mother, often spitting blood and perspiring at night. But she had hidden it, afraid that he would worry over her. One evening her uncle Chang Keng came to demand money—as he often did—and when she would not give him any, Chang Keng smiled coldly and said, 'Don't be so proud; your man is not even up to me!' That made her worried, but she was too shy to ask, and could only cry. Chang Fu at once told her how proper a man her future husband was, but it was too late. Besides, she didn't believe him, and said, 'It's a good thing I'm already like this, so that nothing matters any more.'

"The old woman also said, 'If her man was really not as good as Chang Keng, that would be truly frightful! He would not be up to a chicken thief, and what sort of fellow would that be! But when he came to the funeral I saw him with my own eyes: his clothes were clean and he was very presentable; and he said with tears in his eyes that he had worked so many years on the boat, and with great difficulty saved up money to marry a wife, and now she was dead. Obviously he must really have been a good man, and everything Chang Keng said was false. It was only a pity Ah Shun believed such a rascally liar, so that she died for nothing. But one can't blame any one. One can only blame fate.'

"Since that was the case, my business was finished too. But what about the two sprays of artificial flowers I had brought with me? Well, I asked her to give them to Ah Chao. This Ah Chao no sooner saw me than she fled as if she took me for a wolf or something; I really didn't want to give them to her. However, I did give them to her, and I have only to tell my mother that Ah Shun was delighted with them, and that will be that. Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? One only wants to get them over with somehow. When I have got through New Year I shall go back to teaching Confucius as before."

"Are you teaching Confucius?" I asked in astonishment.

"Of course. Did you think I was teaching English? First I had two pupils, one studying the *Book of Odes*, the other *Mencius*. Recently I have got another, a girl, who is studying the *Canon for Girls*. I don't even teach mathematics; not that I wouldn't teach it, but they don't want it taught."

"I could really never have guessed that you would be teaching such books."

"Their father wants them to study these. I'm an outsider, so it's all the same to me. Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? There's no need to take them seriously."

His whole face was scarlet as if he were quite drunk, but the gleam in his eyes had died down. I gave a slight sigh, and for a time found nothing to say. There was a clatter on the stairs as several customers came up. The first was short, with a round bloated face; the second was tall with a red nose standing out conspicuously on his face. Behind them were others, and as they walked up the small upper floor shook. I turned to look at Lu Wei-fu who was just trying to catch my eye; and then I called the waiter to bring the bill.

"Is your salary enough for you to live on?" I asked as I prepared to leave.

"I have twenty dollars a month, not quite enough to manage on."

"Then what do you mean to do after?"

"After? I don't know. Just think: Has any single thing turned out as we hoped of all we planned in the past? I'm not sure of anything now, not even sure of what I will do tomorrow, not even of the next minute. . . ."

The waiter brought up the bill and gave it to me, and he did not behave so formally as before, just glanced at me, then went on smoking and allowed me to pay the bill.

We went out of the wine shop together. His hotel lay in the opposite direction from mine, so we said goodbye at the door. As I walked alone towards my hotel, cold wind and snow beat against my face, but I felt refreshed. I saw that the sky was already dark, woven together with houses and streets into the white shifting web of thick snow.

February 16, 1924

A HAPPY FAMILY

After the style of Hsu Ching-wen

"... ONE writes simply as one feels like it: such a work is like sunlight, radiating out from a source of infinite brightness, not like fire from a flint struck out from iron or stone. This alone is true art. And such a writer alone is a true artist. . . . But I . . . what do I rank as?"

Having thought so far he suddenly jumped out of bed. It had occurred to him that he must make some money by writing to support his family, and he had already decided to send his manuscripts to the *Happy Monthly* publishers, because the remuneration appeared to be comparatively generous. But the work must have a setting, otherwise it would probably not be accepted. Well, if a setting was needed, a setting it should have. What were the chief problems occupying the minds of the younger generation? . . . Undoubtedly there must be not a few, perhaps a great many, concerning love, marriage, the family. . . . Yes, there were certainly many people perplexed by such questions, even now discussing them. In that case, write about the family. But how to write? . . . Otherwise it would probably not be accepted. Why predict anything so unlucky, still. . . .

Jumping out of bed, in four or five steps he reached the desk, sat down, took out a piece of paper with green lines, and promptly yet resignedly wrote the title: A Happy Family.

His pen immediately came to a standstill. He raised his head, his two eyes fixed on the ceiling, trying to decide on an environment for this Happy Family.

"Peking?" he thought. "That won't do; it's too dead, even the atmosphere is dead. Even if a high wall were built round this family, still the air could scarcely be kept separate. No, that would never do! Kiangsu and Chekiang may start fighting any day, and Fukien is even more out of the question. Szechuan? Kwangtung? They are in the midst of fighting.* What about Shantung or Honan? . . . No, one of them might be kidnapped, and if that happened the happy family would become an unhappy one. The rent in the foreign concessions in Shanghai and Tientsin is too high. . . . To fix on somewhere abroad would seem ridiculous. I don't know what Yunnan and Kweichow are like, but communications are too poor. . . ."

He racked his brains but, unable to think of a good place, decided to fix tentatively on A—. Then, however, he thought: "Nowadays many people object to the use of the Western alphabet to represent the names of people and places, saying it lessens the readers' interest. So when I send in my manuscript this time it would probably be better not to use it, to be on the safe side. In that case what would be a good place? There is fighting in Hunan too; the rent in Dairen is high again. In Chahar, Kirin and Heilungkiang I have heard there are brigands, so they won't do either! . . ."

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* During this period there was civil war between warlords in many parts of China.

Again he racked his brains to think of a good place, but in vain; so finally he made up his mind to fix tentatively on A— as the name of the place where his Happy Family should be.

"After all this Happy Family will have to be at A—. There can't be any question about that. The family naturally consists of a husband and wife—the master and mistress—who married for love. Their marriage contract contains over forty terms going into great detail, so that they have extraordinary equality and absolute freedom. Moreover they have both had a higher education and belong to the cultured élite. . . . Japanese-returned students are no longer the fashion, so let them be Western-returned students. The master of the house always wears a foreign suit, his collar is always snowy white. His wife's hair is always curled up like a sparrow's nest in front, her pearly white teeth are always peeping out, but she wears Chinese dress. . . ."

"That won't do, that won't do! Twenty-five catties!"

Hearing a man's voice outside the window he involuntarily turned his head to look. The sun shone through the curtains hanging by the window, dazzling his eyes, while he heard a sound like small bundles of wood being thrown down. "It doesn't matter," he thought, turning back again. " 'Twenty-five catties' of what? . . . They are the cultured élite, devoted to the arts. But because they have both grown up in happy surroundings, they don't like Russian novels. Most Russian novels describe the lower classes, so they are really quite out of keeping with such a family. 'Twenty-five catties'? Never mind. In that case, what books do they read? . . . Byron's poetry? Keats? That won't do, they are neither of them safe.

. . . Ah, I have it: they both like reading Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. Although I haven't read the book myself, even university professors praise it so highly, I am sure this couple must enjoy it too. You read it, I read it—they have a copy each, two copies altogether in the family. . . ."

Becoming aware of a hollow feeling in his stomach he put down the pen and rested his head on his hands, like a globe suspended from two axles.

" . . . The two of them are just having lunch," he thought. "The table is spread with a snowy white table cloth, and the cook brings in the dishes—Chinese food. 'Twenty-five catties.' Of what? Never mind. Why should it be Chinese food? Westerners say Chinese cooking is the most progressive, the best to eat, the most hygienic; so they eat Chinese food. The first dish is brought in, but what is this first dish? . . ."

"Firewood. . . ."

He turned his head with a start, to see standing on his left the mistress of his own family, her two gloomy eyes fastened on his face.

"What?" He spoke rather indignantly, feeling that her coming disturbed his work.

"The firewood is all used up, so today I have bought some more. Last time it was still two hundred and forty cash for ten catties, but today he wants two hundred and sixty. Suppose I give him two hundred and fifty?"

"All right, two hundred and fifty let it be."

"He has weighed it very unfairly. He insists that there are twenty-four and a half catties, but suppose I count it as twenty-three and a half?"

"All right. Count it as twenty-three and a half catties."

"Then, five fives are twenty-five, three fives are fifteen. . . ."

"Oh, five fives are twenty-five, three fives are fifteen. . . ." He could get no further either, but after stopping for a moment suddenly took up his pen and started working out a sum on the lined paper on which he had written "A Happy Family." After working at it for some time he raised his head to say:

"Five hundred and eighty cash."

"In that case I haven't got enough here; I am still eighty or ninety short. . . ."

He pulled open the drawer of the desk, took out all the money in it, not less than two or three hundred cash, put it in her outstretched hand, watched her go out, and only then turned back to the desk. His head seemed to be bursting as if filled to the brim with sharp faggots. Five fives are twenty-five—scattered Arabic numerals were still imprinted on his brain. He gave a long sigh and breathed out again deeply, as if by this means he might expel the firewood in his head, the five fives are twenty-five and the Arabic numerals. Sure enough, after breathing out his heart seemed much lighter, whereupon he started thinking vaguely again:

"What dish? It doesn't matter, so long as it is something out of the way. Fried pork or shrimps and sea-slugs are really too common. I must have them eating 'Dragon and Tiger.' But what is that exactly? Some people say it's made of snakes and cats, and is an upper-class Cantonese dish, only eaten at big feasts. But I've seen the name on the menu in a Kiangsu restaurant; still, Kiangsu people aren't supposed to eat snakes or cats, so it must be, as someone else said, made of frogs and eels. Now what part of the country shall this couple be from? Never mind. After all, people from any part of the country can eat a dish of snake and cat (or frog and eel), without injuring their Happy Family. At any rate, this first dish is to be 'Dragon and Tiger'; there can be no question about that.

"Now that this bowl of 'Dragon and Tiger' is placed in the middle of the table, they take up their chopsticks simultaneously, point to the dish, smile sweetly at each other and say, in a foreign tongue:

"'Chérie, s'il vous plaît!'

"'Voulez-vous commencer, chéri!'

"'Mais non, après vous!'

"Then they reach out their chopsticks simultaneously, and simultaneously take a morsel of snake—no, no, snake's flesh really sounds too peculiar; it would be better after all to say a morsel of eel. That means then that 'Dragon and Tiger' is made of frogs and eels. They pick out two morsels of eel simultaneously, exactly the same size. Five fives are twenty-five, three fives. . . . Never mind. And simultaneously put them in their mouths. . . ." Against his will he wanted to turn round, because he was conscious of a good deal of excitement behind him, and considerable coming and going. But he persevered, and pursued his train of thought distractedly:

"This seems rather sentimental; no family would behave like this. Whatever makes me so woolly minded? I'm afraid this good subject will never be written up. . . . Or perhaps there is no need to have returned students; people who have received higher education in China would do just as well. They are both university graduates, the cultured élite, the élite. . . . The man is a writer; the woman is also a writer, or else a lover of literature. Or else the woman is a poetess; the man is a lover of poetry, a respecter of womanhood. Or else. . . ."

Finally he could contain himself no longer, and turned round.

Beside the bookcase behind him had appeared a mound of cabbages, three at the bottom, two above, and one at the top, confronting him like a large letter A.

"Oh!" He started and gave a sigh, feeling his cheeks burn, while prickles ran up and down his spine. "Ah!" He took a very deep breath to get rid of the prickly feeling in his spine, then went on thinking: "The house of the Happy Family must have plenty of rooms. There is a store-room where things like cabbages are put. The master's study is apart, its walls lined with bookshelves; there are naturally no cabbages there. The shelves are filled with Chinese books and foreign books, including of course *An Ideal Husband*—two copies altogether. There is a separate bedroom, a copper bed, or something simpler like one of the elmwood beds made by the convicts of Number One Prison would do equally well. Beneath the bed is very clean. . . ." He glanced beneath his own bed; the firewood had all been used up, and there was only a piece of straw rope left, still coiling there like a dead snake.

"Twenty-three and a half catties. . . ." He felt that the firewood was just about to pour in a never-ending stream under his bed, and his head ached again, so he got up quickly and went to the door to close it. But he had scarcely put his hand on the door when he felt that this was too severe and let go his hand, dropping the door curtain thick with dust. At the same time he thought: this method avoids the severity of shutting oneself in, as well as the discomfort of keeping the door open; it is quite in keeping with the *Doctrine of the Mean.**

" . . . So the master's study door is always closed." He walked back, sat down and thought, "Anyone with business must first knock at the door, and have his permission to come in; that is really the only thing to be done. Now suppose the master is sitting in his study and the mistress comes to discuss literature, she has to knock too. . . . But of this one can be assured —at least she will not bring in any cabbages.

" 'Entrez, chérie, s'il vous plaît.'

"But what happens when the master has no time to discuss literature? Does he ignore her, hearing her stand outside tapping gently on the door? Surely that would never do. Maybe it is all described in *An Ideal Husband*—that must really be an excellent novel. If I get money for this article I must buy a copy to read!"

Slap!

His back stiffened, because he knew from experience that this slapping sound was made by his wife's hand striking their three-year-old daughter's head.

"In a Happy Family . . ." he thought, his back still rigid, hearing the child crying, "children should be born late, later. Or perhaps it would be better not to have any at all. It would be better to stay in a hotel and pay a lump sum for everything, just two people without any ties." Hearing the sound of crying increasing in volume he stood up and brushed past the curtain, thinking, "Karl Marx wrote his *Das Kapital* while his children were crying around him. He must really have been a great man. . . ." He walked out, opened the outer door, and was assailed by a strong smell of kerosene. The child was lying on the right of the door, face downwards, and as soon as she saw him she sobbed even more violently.

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* A book, reputedly by Confucius, advocating the principle of moderation in all things.

"There, there, all right, don't cry, don't cry, there's a good girl." He bent down to lift her up. Having lifted her up he turned round to see his wife standing at the left of the door, also with a rigid back, her hands on her hips, as if she were angrily preparing to start physical exercises.

"Even you have to come and bully me! You can't help, you only make trouble—even the kerosene lamp had to turn over. What shall we light this evening? . . ."

"There, there, all right, don't cry, don't cry." Ignoring his wife's trembling tones, he carried the child into the house, stroked her head and repeated, "There's a good girl." Then he put her down, pulled out a chair and sat down. Setting her between his knees, he took her hand and said, "Don't cry, there's a good girl. Daddy will do 'Pussy Washing' for you." At the same time he stretched out his neck, licked his palms from a distance twice, then with them traced circles towards his face.

"Aha! Pussy!" She started laughing.

"That's right, that's right. Pussy." He traced several more circles, and then stopped, seeing her smiling at him with tears still in her eyes. "That sweet innocent face of hers is just like her mother's five years ago," he reflected, "especially her bright red lips, although the general outline is smaller." That had been another bright winter's day when she heard his decision to overcome all obstacles and sacrifice everything for her; when she too looked at him in the same way, smiling, with tears in her eyes. He sat down disconsolately, as if a little drunk.

"Ah, sweet lips," he thought.

The door curtain was suddenly fastened back and the firewood brought in.

Then, suddenly coming to himself again, he saw that the child, still with tears in her eyes, was looking at him with her bright red lips parted. "Lips. . . ." He glanced sidewards to where the firewood was being brought in. " . . . Probably it will be nothing but five fives are twenty-five, nine nines are eighty-one, all over again! . . . And two gloomy eyes. . . ." So thinking he snatched up the green-lined paper with the heading and the figures written on it, crumpled it up and then unfolded it again to wipe her eyes and nose. "Good girl, run along and play by yourself." He pushed her away as he spoke, at the same time throwing the ball of paper into the waste-paper basket.

But at once he felt rather sorry for the child, and, turning his head, followed her with his eyes as she walked forlornly away; while his ears were filled with the sound of firewood. He wanted to concentrate, so he turned back again, closed his eyes and put a stop to all distracting thoughts, sitting there quietly and peacefully.

He saw floating before his eyes a spray of flat, round, black-freckled flowers with orange centres, floating from the left of his left eye to the right, then disappearing; then a spray of bright green flowers, with dark green centres; and finally a pile of six cabbages formed themselves before him into an enormous letter A.

March 19, 1924

THE MISANTHROPE

I

My friendship with Wei Lien-shu, now that I come to think of it, was certainly a strange one. It began with a funeral and ended with a funeral.

When I was in S— town, I often heard him mentioned as an odd fellow: after studying zoology, he had become a history teacher in a middle school; he treated others in cavalier fashion, yet liked to concern himself with their affairs; and while maintaining that the family system should be abolished, he would remit his salary to his grandmother the same day that he drew it. He had many other odd ways, enough to set tongues wagging in S—. One autumn I stayed at Hanshihshan with some relatives also named Wei, who were distantly related to him. However, they understood him even less, looking on him as if he were a foreigner. "He's not like us!" they said.

This was not strange, for although China had had modern schools for some twenty years, there was not even a primary school in Hanshihshan. He was the only one to have left that mountain village to study; hence in the villagers' eyes he was an undoubted freak. However, they also envied him, saying he had made much money.

Towards the end of autumn, there was an epidemic of dysentery in the village, and in alarm I thought of returning to the town. I heard his grandmother had contracted the disease too, and because of her age her case was serious. Moreover there was not a single doctor in the village. Wei had no other relative but this grandmother, who led a simple life with a maidservant. As he had lost both parents in his childhood, she had brought him up. She was said to have known much hardship earlier, but was now leading a happy life. However, since he had neither wife nor children, his family was very quiet, and this presumably was one of the things considered freakish about him.

The village was more than thirty miles from the town by land, and more than twenty miles by water; so that it would take four days to fetch Wei back. In this out-of-the-way village such matters were considered momentous news, eagerly canvassed by all. The next day the old woman was reported to be in a critical state, and the messenger on his way. However, before dawn she died, her last words being:

"Why won't you let me see my grandson?"

Elders of the clan, distant relatives, servants from his grandmother's family, and others, crowded the room, anticipating Wei's return, which would be in time for the funeral. The coffin and shroud were ready, but their immediate problem was how to cope with this grandson, for they were sure he would advocate changes in the funeral rites. After a conference, they decided on three terms which he must accept. Firstly, he must wear deep mourning; secondly, he must kowtow to the coffin; and, thirdly, he must let Buddhist monks or Taoist priests say mass. In short, all must be done in the traditional manner.

This decision once reached, they decided to gather there in full force when Wei arrived home, to assist each other in this negotiation which could admit of no compromise. Licking their lips, the villagers eagerly awaited developments. Wei, as a "modern," "a follower of foreign creeds," was bound to prove unreasonable. A struggle would certainly ensue, which might even result in some novel spectacle.

He arrived home, I heard, in the afternoon, and only bowed to his grandmother's coffin as he entered. The elders proceeded at once according to plan. They summoned him to the hall, and after a lengthy preamble led up to the subject, by speaking in unison and at length giving him no chance to argue. At last, however, they dried up, and a deep silence fell in the hall. All eyes fastened fearfully on his lips. However, without changing countenance, he answered simply:

"All right."

This was totally unexpected. A weight had been lifted from their minds, yet their hearts felt heavier than ever, for this was so "freakish" as to give rise to anxiety. The villagers looking for news were also disappointed, and said to each other, "Strange. He said, 'All right.' Let's go and watch." Wei's "all right" meant that all would be in accordance with tradition, in which case it was not worth watching; however they wanted to look on, and after dusk the hall filled with light-hearted spectators.

I was one of the spectators, having first sent along one lot of incense and candles. As I arrived he was already putting the shroud on the dead. He was a thin man with an angular face, hidden to a certain extent by his dishevelled hair, dark eyebrows and moustache. His eyes gleamed darkly. He laid out the body very well, as deftly as an expert, so that the spectators were impressed. According to the local custom, during this ceremony the relatives of the dead found fault even if all was well done; however he remained silent, complying with their wishes with a face devoid of all expression. A grey-haired old woman standing before me gave a sigh of envy and respect.

Then people kowtowed; then they wailed, all the women chanting as they wailed. When the body was put in the coffin, all kowtowed again, then wailed again, until the lid of the coffin was nailed down. Silence reigned for a moment, and then there was a stir of surprise and dissatisfaction. I too suddenly realized that Wei had not shed a single tear from beginning to end. He was simply sitting on the mourner's mat, his two eyes gleaming darkly.

In this atmosphere of surprise and dissatisfaction, the ceremony ended. The disgruntled mourners seemed about to leave, but Wei was still sitting on the mat, lost in thought. Suddenly, tears fell from his eyes, then he burst into a long wail like a wounded wolf howling in the wilderness at the dead of night, anger and sorrow mingled with his agony. This was not in accordance with tradition, and, taken by surprise, we were at a loss. After a little hesitation, some went to try to persuade him to stop, and these were joined by more and more people until finally there was a crowd round him. But he sat there wailing, motionless as an iron statue.

With a sense of anti-climax, the crowd dispersed. Wei continued to cry for about half an hour, then suddenly stopped, and without a word to the mourners went straight inside. Later it was reported by spies that he had gone into his grandmother's room, lain down on the bed, and, to all appearances, fallen sound asleep.

Two days later, on the eve of my return to town, I heard the villagers discussing eagerly, as if they were possessed, how Wei intended to burn most of the furniture and possessions for his dead grandmother, giving the rest to the maidservant who had attended her during her life and mourned at her funeral. Even the house was to be lent to the maid for an indefinite period. Wei's relatives argued themselves hoarse, but could not shake his resolution.

Largely out of curiosity, perhaps, on my way back I passed his house and went in to express condolence. He received me wearing a hemless white mourning dress, and his expression was as cold as ever. I urged him not to take it so to heart, but apart from grunting noncommittally, he only said:

"Thanks for your concern."

II

Early that winter we met for the third time. It was in a book-shop in S—, where we nodded simultaneously, showing at least that we were acquainted. But it was at the end of that year, after I lost my job, that we became friends. Thenceforward I paid Wei many visits. In the first place, of course, I had nothing to do; in the second place he was said to sympathize with lame dogs, despite his habitual reserve. However, fortune being fickle, lame dogs do not remain lame forever, hence he had few steady friends. Report proved true, for as soon as I sent in my card, he received me. His sitting-room consisted of two rooms thrown into one, quite bare of ornament, with nothing in it apart from table and chairs but some bookcases. Although he was reputed to be terribly "modern," there were few modern books on the shelves. He knew that I had lost my job; but after the usual polite remarks had been exchanged, host and guest sat silent, with nothing to say to each other. I noticed he very quickly finished his cigarette, only dropping it to the ground when it nearly burnt his fingers.

"Have a cigarette," he said suddenly, reaching for another.

So I took one and, between puffs, spoke of teaching and books, still finding very little to say. I was just thinking of leaving, when shouts and footsteps were heard outside the door, and four children rushed in. The eldest was about eight or nine, the smallest four or five. The hands, faces and clothes were very dirty, and they were thoroughly unprepossessing; yet Wei's face lit up with pleasure, and getting up at once he walked to the other room, saying:

"Come, Taliang, Erhliang, all of you! I have bought the mouth-organs you wanted yesterday."

The children rushed in after him, to return immediately with a mouth-organ apiece; but once outside they started fighting, and one of them cried.

"There's one each; they're exactly the same. Don't squabble!" he said, as he followed them.

"Whose children are they?" I asked.

"The landlord's. They have no mother, only a grandmother."

"Your landlord is a widower?"

"Yes. His wife died three or four years ago, and he has not remarried. Otherwise, he would not rent his spare rooms to a bachelor like me." He said this with a cold smile.

I wanted very much to ask why he had remained single so long, but I did not know him well enough.

Once you knew him well, he was a good talker. He was full of ideas, many of them most remarkable. What exasperated me was some of his guests. As a result, probably, of reading romantic novels, they constantly referred to themselves as "the young unfortunate" or "the outcast"; and, sprawling on the big chairs like lazy and arrogant crabs, they would sigh, smoke and frown all at the same time.

Then there were the landlord's children, who were always fighting among themselves, knocking over bowls and plates, begging for cakes, keeping up an ear-splitting din. Yet the sight of them invariably dispelled Wei's customary coldness, and he prized them more than his own life. Once the third child was said to have measles. He was so worried that his dark face took on an even darker hue; however the attack proved a light one, and thereafter the children's grandmother made a joke of his anxiety.

"Children are always good. They are all so innocent. . . ." He seized an opening to say one day, having, apparently, sensed my impatience.

"Not always," I answered casually.

"Always. Children have none of the faults of grown-ups. If they turn out badly later, as you contend, it is because they have been moulded by their environment. Originally they are not bad, but innocent. . . . I think China's only hope lies in this."

"I don't agree. Without the root of evil, how could they bear evil fruit in later life? Take a seed, for example. It is because it contains the embryo leaves, flowers and fruits, that it can grow later into these things. There must be a cause. . . ." Since my unemployment, just like those great officials who resigned from office and took up Buddhism, I had been reading the Buddhist sutras. I did not understand Buddhist philosophy, and was just talking at random.

However, Wei was annoyed. He gave me a look, then said no more. I could not tell whether he had no more to say, or whether he felt it not worth arguing with me. But he looked cold again, as he had not done for a long time, and smoked two cigarettes one after the other in silence. By the time he reached for the third cigarette, I had to beat a retreat.

Our estrangement lasted three months. Then, owing in part to forgetfulness, in part to the fact that he fell out with those "innocent" children, he came to consider my slighting remarks on children as excusable. Or so I surmised. This happened in my house after drinking one day, when, with a rather melancholy look, he cocked his head, and said:

"Come to think of it, it's really curious. On my way here I met a small child with a reed in his hand, which he pointed at me, shouting, "Kill!" He was just a toddler. . . ."

"He must have been moulded by his environment."

As soon as I had said this, I wanted to take it back. However, he did not seem to care, just went on drinking heavily, smoking furiously in between.

"I meant to ask you," I said, trying to change the subject. "You don't usually call on people, what made you come out today? I've known you for more than a year, yet this is the first time you've been here."

"I was just going to tell you: don't call on me for the time being. There are a father and son in my place who are a perfect pest. They are scarcely human!"

"Father and son? Who are they?" I was surprised.

"My cousin and his son. Well, the son resembles the father."

"I suppose they came to town to see you and have a good time?"

"No. They came to talk me into adopting the boy."

"What, to adopt the boy?" I exclaimed in amazement. "But you are not married."

"They know I won't marry. But that's nothing to them. Actually they want to inherit that tumbledown house of mine in the village. I have no other property, you know; as soon as I get money I spend it. I've only that house. Their purpose in life is to drive out that old maidservant who has borrowed the place."

The cynicism of his remark took me aback. However I tried to soothe him, by saying:

"I don't think your relatives can be so bad. They are only rather old-fashioned. For instance, that year when you cried bitterly, they came forward eagerly to plead with you. . . ."

"When I was a child and my father died, because they wanted to take the house from me and make me put my mark on the document, I cried bitterly too, and they also came forward eagerly to plead with me. . . ." He looked up, as if searching the air for that bygone scene.

"The crux of the matter is—you have no children. Why don't you get married?" I had found a way to change the subject, and this was something I had been wanting to ask for a long time. It seemed an excellent opportunity.

He looked at me in surprise, then dropped his gaze to his knees, and started smoking. I received no answer to my question.

III

Yet, even this inane existence he was not allowed to enjoy in peace. Gradually there appeared anonymous attacks in the less reputable papers, and in the schools rumours concerning him spread. This was not the simple gossip of the old days, but deliberately damaging. I knew this was the outcome of articles he had taken to writing for the magazines, so I paid no attention. The citizens of S— disliked nothing more than fearless argument, and anyone guilty of it would indubitably become the object of secret attacks. This was the rule, and Wei knew it too. However, in spring, when I heard he had been asked to resign by the school authorities, I confess it surprised me. Of course, this was only to be expected, and it surprised me simply because I had hoped my friend could escape. The citizens of S— were not proving more vicious than usual.

I was occupied then with my own problems, negotiating to go to a school in Shanyang that autumn, so I had no time to call on him. Some three months passed before I was at leisure, and even then it had not occurred to me to visit him. One day, passing the main street, I happened to pause before a second-hand bookstall, where I was startled to see displayed an early edition of the *Commentaries on Ssuma Chien's History,* from Wei's collection. He was no connoisseur, but he loved books, and I knew he prized this particular book. He must be very hard pressed to have sold it. It seemed scarcely possible he could have become so poor only two or three months after losing his job; yet he spent money as soon as he had it, and had never saved. So I decided to call on him. On the same street I bought a bottle of liquor, two packages of peanuts and two smoked fish-heads.

His door was closed. I called out twice, but there was no reply. Thinking he was asleep, I called louder, hammering on the door at the same time.

"He's out." The children's grandmother, a fat woman with small eyes, thrust her grey head out from the opposite window, and spoke impatiently.

"Where has he gone?" I asked.

"Where? Who knows—where could he go? You can wait, he will be back soon."

So I pushed open the door and went into his sitting-room. It was greatly changed, looking desolate in its emptiness. There was little furniture left, while of his library only those foreign books which could not be sold remained. The middle of the room was still occupied by the table round which those woeful and gallant young men, unrecognized geniuses, and dirty, noisy children had formerly gathered. Now it all seemed very quiet, and there was a thin layer of dust on the table. I put the bottle and packages down, pulled over a chair, and sat down by the table facing the door.

Very soon, sure enough, the door opened, and someone stepped in as silently as a shadow. It was Wei. It might have been the twilight that made his face look dark; but his expression was unchanged.

"Ah, it's you? How long have you been here?" He seemed pleased.

"Not very long," I said. "Where have you been?"

"Nowhere in particular. Just taking a stroll."

He pulled up a chair too and sat by the table. We started drinking, and I spoke of his losing his job. However, he did not care to talk about it, considering it as only to be expected. He had come across many similar cases. It was not strange at all, and not worth discussing. As usual, he drank heavily, and discoursed on society and the study of history. Something made me glance at the empty bookshelves, and, remembering the *Commentaries on Ssuma Chien's History,* I was conscious of a slight loneliness and sadness.

"Your sitting-room has a deserted look. . . . Have you had fewer visitors recently?"

"None at all. They don't find it much fun when I'm not in a good mood. A bad mood certainly makes people uncomfortable. Just as no one goes to the park in winter. . . ."

He took two sips of liquor in succession, then fell silent. Suddenly, looking up, he asked, "I suppose you have had no luck either in finding work?"

Although I knew quite well he was slightly intoxicated, I was annoyed. Just as I was about to retort, he pricked up his ears, then, scooping up some peanuts, went out. Outside, the laughter and shouts of the children could be heard.

But as soon as he went out, the children became quiet. It sounded as if they had left. He went after them, and said something, but I could hear no reply. Then he came back, as silent as a shadow, and put the handful of peanuts back in the package.

"They don't even want to eat my things," he said sarcastically, in a low voice.

"Old Wei," I said, forcing a smile, although I was sick at heart. "I think you are deliberately tormenting yourself. Why think so poorly of your fellowmen?"

He only smiled cynically.

"I haven't finished yet. I suppose you consider people like me, who come here occasionally, do so in order to kill time or amuse themselves at your expense?"

"No, I don't. Well, sometimes I do. Perhaps they come to find something to talk about."

"Then you are wrong. People are not like that. You are really wrapping yourself up like a cocoon. You ought to take a more cheerful view." I sighed.

"Maybe. But tell me, where does the thread for the cocoon come from? Of course, there are plenty of people like that; take my grandmother, for example. Although I have none of her blood in my veins, I may inherit her fate. But that doesn't matter, I have already bewailed my fate together with hers. . . ."

Then I remembered what had happened at his grandmother's funeral. I could almost see it before my eyes.

"I still don't understand why you cried so bitterly," I said bluntly.

"You mean at my grandmother's funeral? No, you wouldn't." He lit the lamp. "I suppose it was because of that that we became friends," he said quietly. "You know, this grandmother was my grandfather's second wife. My father's own mother died when he was three." Growing thoughtful, he drank silently, and finished a smoked fish-head.

"I didn't know it to begin with. Only, from my childhood I was puzzled. At that time my father was still alive, and our family was well off. During the lunar New Year we would hang up the ancestral images and hold a grand sacrifice. It was one of my rare pleasures to look at those splendidly dressed images. At that time a maidservant would always carry me to an image, and point at it, saying: 'This is your own grandmother. Bow to her so that she will protect you and make you grow up strong and healthy.' I could not understand how I came to have another grandmother, in addition to the one beside me. But I liked this grandmother who was 'my own.' She was not as old as the granny at home. Young and beautiful, wearing a red costume with golden embroidery, and a head-dress decked with pearls, she resembled my mother. When I looked at her, her eyes seemed to gaze down on me, and a faint smile appeared on her lips. I knew she was very fond of me too.

"But I liked the granny at home too, who sat all day under the window slowly plying her needle. However, no matter how merrily I laughed and played in front of her, or called to her, I could not make her laugh; and that made me feel she was cold, unlike other children's grandmothers. Still, I liked her. Later on, though, I gradually cooled towards her, not because I had grown older and learned she was not my own grandmother, but rather because I was exasperated by the way she kept on sewing mechanically, day in day out. She was unchanged however. She sewed, looked after me, loved and protected me as before; and though she seldom smiled, she never scolded me. It was the same after my father died. Later on, we lived almost entirely on her sewing, so it was still the same, until I went to school. . . ."

The light flickered, as the kerosene gave out; so he stood up to refill the lamp from a small tin kettle under the bookcase.

"The price of kerosene has gone up twice this month," he said slowly, after turning up the wick. "Life will become harder every day. She remained the same until I graduated from school and got a job, when our life became more secure. She didn't change, I suppose, until she was sick and couldn't carry on, but had to take to her bed. . . .

"Since her later days, I think, were not too unhappy on the whole, and she lived to a great age, I need not have mourned. Besides, weren't there a lot of others there eager to wail? Even those who had tried their hardest to rob her, wailed, or appeared bowed down with grief." He laughed. "However, at that moment her whole life rose to my mind—the life of one who created loneliness for herself and tasted its bitterness. And I felt there were many people like that. I wanted to weep for them; but perhaps it was largely because I was too sentimental. . . .

"Your present advice to me is what I felt with regard to her. But actually my ideas at that time were wrong. As for myself, since I grew up, my feelings for her cooled. . . ."

He paused, with a cigarette between his fingers; and bending his head lost himself in thought. The lamplight flickered.

"Well, it is hard to live so that no one will mourn for your death," he said, as if to himself. After a pause he looked up at me, and said, "I suppose you can't help? I shall have to find something to do very soon."

"Have you no other friends you could ask?" I was in no position to help myself then, let alone others.

"I have a few, but they are all in the same boat. . . ."

When I left him, the full moon was high in the sky, and the night was very still.

IV

The teaching profession in Shanyang was no bed of roses. I taught for two months without receiving a cent of salary, until I had to cut down on cigarettes. But the school staff, even those earning only fifteen or sixteen dollars a month, were easily contented. They all had iron constitutions steeled by hardship, and, although lean and haggard, would work from morning till night; while if interrupted at work by their superiors, they would stand up respectfully. Thus they all practised plain living and high thinking. This reminded me, somehow, of Wei's parting words. He was then even more hard up, and often looked embarrassed, having apparently lost his former cynicism. When he heard that I was leaving, he had come late at night to see me off, and, after hesitating for some time, had stuttered:

"Would there be anything for me there? Even copying work, at twenty to thirty dollars a month, would do. I. . . ."

I was surprised. I had not thought he would consider anything so low, and did not know how to answer.

"I. . . I have to live a little longer. . . ."

"I'll look out when I get there. I'll do my best."

This was what I had promised at the time, and the words often rang in my ears later, as if Wei were before me, stuttering: "I have to live a little longer."

I tried to interest various people in his case, but to no avail. There were few vacancies, and many unemployed; they always ended by apologizing for being unable to help, and I would write him an apologetic letter. By the end of the term, things had gone from bad to worse. The magazine *Reason*, edited by some of the local gentry, began to attack me. Naturally no names were mentioned, but it cleverly insinuated that I was stirring up trouble in the school, even my recommendation of Wei being interpreted as a manoeuvre to gather a clique about me.

So I had to keep quiet. Apart from attending class, I lay low in my room, sometimes even fearing I might be considered as stirring up trouble when cigarette smoke escaped from my window. For Wei, naturally, I could do nothing. This state of affairs prevailed till midwinter.

It had been snowing all day, and the snow had not stopped by evening. Outside was so still, you could almost hear the sound of stillness. I closed my eyes and sat there in the dim lamplight, doing nothing, imagining the snow-flakes falling to fill the boundless drifts of snow. It would be nearly New Year at home too, and everybody would be busy. I saw myself a child again, making a snow man with a group of children on the level ground in the back yard. The eyes of the snow man, made of jet-black fragments of coal, suddenly turned into Wei's eyes.

"I have to live a little longer." The same voice again.

"What for?" I asked inadvertently, aware immediately of the ineptitude of this remark.

This inept remark woke me up. I sat up, lit a cigarette and opened the window, to find the snow falling even faster. Then I heard a knock at the door, and a moment later it opened to admit the servant, whose step I knew. He handed me a big envelope, more than six inches in length. The address was scrawled, but I saw Wei's name on it.

This was the first letter he had written me since I left S—. Knowing he was a bad correspondent, I had not been surprised at his silence, only sometimes I had felt he should have given me some news of himself. The receipt of this letter was another surprise. I tore it open. The letter had been hastily scrawled too, and this was what he wrote:

> ". . . Shen-fei,
>
> "How should I address you? I am leaving a blank for you to fill in as you please. It will be all the same to me.
>
> "I have received three letters from you altogether. I did not reply for one simple reason: I had no money even to buy stamps.
>
> "Perhaps you would like to know what has happened to me. To put it simply: I have failed. I thought I had failed before, but I was wrong then; now, however, I am really a failure. Formerly there was someone who wanted me to live a little longer, and I wished it too, but found it difficult. Now, there is no need, yet I must go on living. . . .
>
> "Shall I then live on?
>
> "The one who wanted me to live a little longer could not live himself. He was trapped and killed by the enemy. Who killed him? No one knows.
>
> "Changes take place so swiftly! During the last half year I was virtually a beggar; it's true, I could be considered a beggar. However, I had

my purpose: I was willing to beg for the cause, to go cold and hungry for it, to be lonely for it, to suffer hardship for it. But I did not want to destroy myself. So you see, the fact that one person wanted me to live on, proved extremely potent. But now there is no one, not one. At the same time I feel I do not deserve to live, nor other people either, in my opinion. Yet, I am conscious of wanting to live on to spite those who wish me dead; for at least there is no one left who wants me to live decently, and so no one can be hurt. I don't want to hurt such people. But now there is no one, not one. What a joy! Wonderful! I am now doing what I formerly detested and opposed. I am now giving up all I formerly believed in and upheld. I have really failed—but I have won.

"Do you think I am mad? Do you think I have become a hero or a great man? No, it is not that. It is very simple; I have become advisor to General Tu, and so I have eighty dollars salary a month.

"Shen-fei. . . .

"What will you think of me? You decide; it is the same to me.

"Perhaps you still remember my former sitting-room, the one in which we had our first and last talks. I am still using it. There are new guests, new bribes, new flattery, new seeking for promotion, new kowtows and bows, new mah-jong and drinking games, new haughtiness and disgust, new sleeplessness and vomiting of blood. . . .

"You said in your last letter that your teaching was not going well. Would you like to be an advisor? Say the word, and I will arrange it for you. Actually, work in the gatehouse would be the same. There would be the same guests, bribes and flattery. . . .

"It is snowing heavily here. How is it where you are? It is now midnight, and having just vomitted some blood has sobered me. I recall that you have actually written three times in succession to me since autumn—amazing! So I must give you some news of myself, hoping you will not be shocked.

"I probably shall not write again; you know my ways of old. When will you be back? If you come soon, we may meet again. Still, I suppose we have taken different roads, so you had better forget me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for trying to find work for me. But now please forget me; I am doing 'well.'

Wei Lien-shu
December 14th."

Though this letter did not "shock" me, when, after a hasty perusal, I read it carefully again, I felt both uneasy and relieved. At least his livelihood was secure, and I need not worry any more. At any rate, I could do nothing here. I thought of writing to him, but felt there was nothing to say.

In fact, I was gradually forgetting him. His face no longer sprang so often to my mind's eye. However, less than ten days after hearing from him, the local press started sending its newspaper to me. I did not read such papers as a rule, but since it was sent to me, I glanced at some of the contents. And this reminded me of Wei, for the paper frequently carried poems and essays about him, such as "Calling on the scholar Wei at night during a snowstorm," "A poetic gathering at the scholarly abode of Advisor Wei," and so forth. Once, indeed, under the heading "Table Talk," they retailed with gusto certain stories which had previously been considered material for ridicule, but which had now become "tales of an eccentric genius." Only such an exceptional man, it was implied, could have done such unusual things.

Although this recalled him to me, my impression of him was growing fainter. Yet all the time he seemed to be gaining a closer hold on me, which often gave me an inexplicable sense of uneasiness and cast a shadow of apprehension. However, by autumn the newspaper stopped coming, while the Shanyang magazine began to publish the first instalment of a long essay called "The element of truth in rumours," which asserted that rumours about certain gentlemen had reached the ears of the mighty. My name was among those attacked. I had then to be very careful. I had to take care that my cigarette smoke did not get in other people's way. All these precautions took so much time, I could attend to nothing else, and naturally had no leisure to think of Wei. I had actually forgotten him.

However, I could not hold my job till summer. By the end of May I had left Shanyang.

V

I wandered between Shanyang, Licheng and Taiku for more than half a year, but could find no work, so I decided to go back to S—. I arrived one afternoon in early spring. It was a cloudy day with everything wrapped in mist. Since the rooms in my old hostel were still vacant, I stayed there. On the road I had started thinking of Wei, and after my arrival I made up my mind to call on him after dinner. Taking two packages of the well-known Wenhsi cakes, I threaded my way through several damp streets, skirting many dogs lying in the way, until I reached his door. It seemed very bright inside. I thought even his rooms were better lit since he had become an advisor, and I smiled to myself. However, when I looked up, I saw a strip of white paper* stuck on the door. It occurred to me, as I stepped inside, that the children's grandmother might be dead; but I went straight in.

In the dimly lit courtyard there was a coffin, by which some soldier or orderly in uniform was standing, talking to the children's grandmother. A few workers in short coats were loitering there too. My heart began to beat faster. Just then she turned to look at me.

"Ah, you're back? Why didn't you come earlier?" she suddenly exclaimed.

"Who . . . who has passed away?" Actually by now I knew, but still I asked.

"Advisor Wei died the day before yesterday."

I looked around. The sitting-room was dimly lit, probably by one lamp only; the front room, however, was decked with white funeral curtains, and the woman's grandchildren had gathered outside that room.

"His body is there," she said, coming forward and pointing to the front room. "After Mr. Wei was promoted, I let him my front room too; that is where he is now."

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* White is the mourning colour in China. White paper on the door indicated that there had been a death in the house.

There was no writing on the funeral curtain. In front stood a long table, then a square table, spread with some dozen dishes. As I went in, two men in long white gowns suddenly appeared to bar the way, their eyes, like those of a dead fish, fixed in surprise and mistrust on my face. I hastily explained my relation with Wei, and the landlady came up to confirm my statement. Then their hands and eyes dropped, and they allowed me to go forward to bow to the dead.

As I bowed, a wail sounded beside me from the floor. Looking down I saw a child of about ten, kneeling on a mat, also dressed in white. His hair had been cut short, and had flax attached to it.

Later I found out one of these was Wei's cousin, his nearest in kin, while the other was a distant nephew. I asked to be allowed to see Wei, but they tried their best to dissuade me, saying I was too "polite." Finally they gave in, and lifted the curtain.

This time I saw Wei in death. But, strangely enough, though he was wearing a crumpled shirt, stained in front with blood, and his face was very lean, yet his expression was unchanged. He was sleeping so placidly, with closed mouth and eyes, that I was tempted to put my finger before his nostrils to see if he were still breathing.

Everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead. As I withdrew, his cousin accosted me to state that Wei's untimely death, just when he was in the prime of life and had a great future before him, was not only a calamity for his humble family, but also a cause of sorrow for his friends. He seemed to be apologizing for Wei for dying. Such eloquence is rare among villagers; however, after that he fell silent again, and everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead.

Feeling cheerless, but by no means sad, I withdrew to the courtyard to chat with the old woman. She told me the funeral would soon take place; they were waiting for the shroud. And when the coffin was nailed down, people born under certain stars should not be near. She rattled on, her words pouring out like a flood. She spoke of Wei's illness, incidents during his life, and even voiced certain criticisms.

"You know, after Mr. Wei came into luck, he was a different man. He held his head high and looked very haughty. He stopped treating people in his old pedantic way. Did you know, he used to act like an idiot, and call me madam? Later on," she chuckled, "he called me 'old bitch'; it was too funny for words. When people sent him rare herbs like carthamus, instead of eating them himself, he would throw them into the courtyard, just here, and call out, 'You take this, old bitch!' After he came into luck, he had scores of visitors; so I vacated my front room for him, and moved into the side room. As we have always said jokingly, he became a different man after his good luck. If you had come one month earlier, you could have seen all the fun here: drinking games practically every day, talking, laughing, singing, poetry writing and mah-jong games. . . .

"He used to be more afraid of children than they are of their own father, practically grovelling to them. But recently that changed too, and he was a good one for jokes. My grandchildren liked to play with him, and would go to his rooms whenever they could. He would think up all sorts of jokes; when they wanted him to buy things for them, he would make them bark like dogs or make a thumping kowtow. Ah, that was fun. Two months ago, my second grandchild asked him to buy him a pair of shoes, and had to make three thumping kowtows. He's still wearing them; they aren't worn out yet."

When one of the men in white came out, she stopped talking. I asked about Wei's illness, but there was little she could tell me. She only knew he had been losing weight for a long time, but they had thought nothing of it, because he always looked so cheerful. About a month before, they heard he had been coughing blood, but it seemed he had not seen a doctor. Then he had to stay in bed, and three days before he died he seemed to have lost the power of speech. His cousin had come all the way from the village to ask him if he had any savings, but he said not a word. His cousin thought he was shamming, but some people had said those dying of consumption did lose the power of speech. . . .

"But Mr. Wei was a queer man," she suddenly whispered. "He never saved money, always spent it like water. His cousin still suspects we got something out of him. Heaven knows, we got nothing. He just spent it in his haphazard way. Buying something today, selling it tomorrow, or breaking it up—God knows what happened. When he died there was nothing left, all spent. Otherwise it would not be so dismal today. . . .

"He just fooled about, not wanting to do the proper thing. I had thought of that, and spoken to him. At his age, he should have got married; it would have been easy for him then. And if no suitable family could be found, at least he should have bought a few concubines to be going on with. People should keep up appearances. But he would laugh whenever I brought it up. 'Old bitch, you are always worrying about such things for other people,' he would say. You see how frivolous he was, he wouldn't listen to good advice. If he had listened to me, he would not be wandering lonely in the nether world now; at least there would be wailing from his dear ones. . . ."

A shop assistant arrived, bringing some clothes with him. The three relatives of the dead picked out the pyjamas, then disappeared behind the curtain. Soon, the curtain was lifted; the new pyjamas had been put on the corpse, and they proceeded to put on his outer garments. I was surprised to see them dress him in a pair of khaki military trousers with broad red stripes, and a coat with glittering epaulettes. I could not say what rank these indicated, or how he acquired that rank. Then the body was placed in the coffin. Wei lay there awkwardly, a pair of brown leather shoes beside his feet, a paper sword at his waist, and beside his lean and ashen face a military cap with a gilt fringe.

The three relatives wailed beside the coffin, then stopped and wiped their tears. The boy with flax attached to his hair withdrew, as did the old woman's third grandchild—no doubt they were born under the wrong stars.

As the labourers lifted the coffin lid, I stepped forward to see Wei for the last time.

In his awkward costume he lay placidly, with closed mouth and eyes. There seemed to be an ironical smile on his lips, mocking the ridiculous corpse.

When the nails began to be hammered in, the wailing started afresh. I could not stand it very long, so withdrew to the courtyard; then, somehow, I was out of the gate. The damp road glistened, and I looked up at the sky where the cloud banks had scattered and a full moon hung, shedding a cool light.

I walked with quickened steps, as if eager to break through some heavy barrier, but finding it impossible. Something struggled in my ears, and, after a long, long time, burst out. It was like a long howl, the howl of a wounded wolf crying in the wilderness in the depth of night, anger and sorrow mingled in its agony.

Then my heart felt lighter, and I paced calmly on along the damp cobbled road under the moon.

October 17, 1925

REGRET FOR THE PAST

Chuan-sheng's Notes

I want, if I can, to describe my remorse and grief for Tzu-chun's sake as well as for my own. This shabby room, tucked away in a forgotten corner of the hostel, is so quiet and empty. Time really flies. A whole year has passed since I fell in love with Tzu-chun, and, thanks to her, escaped from this quietness and emptiness. On my return, as ill luck would have it, this was the only room vacant. The broken window with the half dead locust tree and old wistaria outside and square table inside are the same as before. The same too are the mouldering wall and wooden bed beside it. At night I lie in bed alone just as I did before I started living with Tzu-chun. The past year has been blotted out as if it had never been—as if I never moved out of this shabby room to set up a small home so hopefully in Chichao Street.

Nor is that all. A year ago this silence and emptiness were different—there was often an expectancy about them. I was expecting Tzu-chun's arrival. As I waited long and impatiently, the tapping of high heels on the brick pavement would galvanize me into life. Then I would see her pale round face dimpling in a smile, her thin white arms, striped cotton blouse and black skirt. And she would bring in a new leaf from the half withered locust tree outside the window for me to look at, or clusters of the mauve flowers that hung from the old wistaria tree, the trunk of which looked as if made of iron.

But now there is only the old silence and emptiness. Tzu-chun will not be coming again—never, never again.

In Tzu-chun's absence, I could see nothing in this shabby room. Out of sheer boredom I would pick up a book—science or literature, it was all the same to me—and read on and on, till I realized I had turned a dozen pages without taking in a word I had read. Only my ears were so sensitive, I seemed able to hear all the footsteps outside the gate, those of Tzu-chun among the rest. Her steps often sounded as if they were drawing nearer and nearer—only to grow fainter again, until they were lost in the tramping of other feet. I hated the servant's son who wore cloth-soled shoes which sounded quite different from Tzu-chun's. I hated the minx next door who used face cream, who often wore new leather shoes, and whose steps sounded all too like Tzu-chun's.

Could her rickshaw have been upset? Could she have been knocked over by a tram? . . .

I would be on the point of putting on my hat to go and see her, but her uncle had cursed me to my face.

Suddenly I would hear her coming nearer step by step, and by the time I was out to meet her she would already be under the wistaria trellis, her face dimpling in a smile. Probably she wasn't badly treated after all in her uncle's home. I would calm down and, after we had gazed at each other in silence for a moment, the shabby room would be filled with the sound of my voice as I held forth on the tyranny of the home, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore and Shelley. . . .

She would nod her head, smiling, her eyes filled with a childlike look of wonder. On the wall was nailed a copperplate bust of Shelley, cut out from a magazine. It was the best portrait of him, but when I pointed it out to her she only gave it a hasty glance, then hung her head as if in embarrassment. In things like this, Tzu-chun probably hadn't yet freed herself entirely from inhibitions. It occurred to me later it might be better to substitute the picture commemorating Shelley's death by drowning, or a portrait of Ibsen. But I never got round to it. And now even this picture has vanished.

"I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me."

She came out with this statement clearly, firmly and gravely, after a thoughtful silence—we had been talking about her uncle who was here and her father who was at home. We had then known each other for half a year. By that time I had told her all my views, all that had happened to me, and what my failings were. I had hidden very little, and she understood me completely. These few words of hers stirred me to the bottom of my heart, and rang in my ears for many days after. I was unspeakably happy to know that Chinese women were not as hopeless as the pessimists made out, and that we should see them in the not too distant future in all their glory.

Each time I saw her out, I always kept several paces behind her. And always the old man's face with its whiskers like fishy tentacles would be pressed so hard against the dirty window pane, even the tip of his nose was flattened. While when we reached the outer courtyard, against the bright glass window there was that minx's face, plastered with face cream. But walking out proudly without looking right or left, Tzu-chun did not see them. And I walked proudly back.

"I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me." Her mind was completely made up on this point. She was by far the clearer and stronger of the two of us. What did she care about the half pot of face cream or the flattened nose tip?

I can't remember clearly now how I expressed my pure, passionate love for her. Not only now—even just after it happened, my impression was very blurred. When I thought back at night, I could only remember snatches of what I had said, while a month or two after we started living together; even these fragments became a dream that eluded me. I only remember how for about a fortnight beforehand I had reflected very carefully what attitude to adopt, prepared what to say, and decided what to do if I were refused. But when the time came it was all no use. In my nervousness, I unconsciously used the method I had seen on the movies. The memory of this makes me thoroughly ashamed, yet this is the one thing I remember clearly. Even today it is like a solitary lamp in a dark room, lighting me up as I clasped her hand with tears in my eyes, and went down on one knee. . . .

I have only the haziest recollection too of Tzu-chun's behaviour at the time. All I know was that she accepted me. However, I seem to remember her face first turned pale then gradually flushed red—redder than I have ever seen it before or since. Sadness and joy flashed from her childlike eyes, mingled with apprehension, although she struggled to avoid my gaze, looking as if she would like to fly out of the window in her confusion. Then I knew she consented, although I didn't know what she said, or whether she said anything at all.

She, however, remembered everything. She could recite all that I said non-stop, as if she had learned it by heart; and describe all my actions in detail, to the life, like a film which included, naturally, that shallow scene from the movies which I was anxious to forget. At night, when all was still, it was our time for review. I was often questioned and examined, or ordered to retell all that had been said on that occasion; but she often had to fill up gaps and correct my mistakes, as if I were a Grade D student.

Gradually these reviews became few and far between. But whenever I saw her gazing raptly into space, a tender look coming over her and dimpling, I knew she was going over that old lesson again, and would be afraid she was seeing my ridiculous act from the movies. I knew, though, that she must have seen it, and that she insisted on seeing it.

But she didn't find it ridiculous. Though I thought it laughable, even contemptible, she didn't find it so at all. And I knew this was because she loved me so purely and passionately.

Late spring last year was our happiest and busiest time. I was calmer then, although one part of my mind was more active than before. This was when we started going out together. We went several times to the park, but more often to look for lodgings. On the road I was conscious of searching looks, sarcastic smiles or lewd and contemptuous glances which tended, if I was not careful, to make me shiver. At every instant I had to summon all my pride and defiance to my support. She was quite fearless, however, and completely impervious to all this. She proceeded slowly forward, as calmly as if there were nobody in sight.

It was no easy matter finding lodgings. In most cases we were refused on some pretext, while some places we turned down as unsuitable. In the beginning we were very particular—and yet not too particular either, because we saw most of these lodgings were unsuitable. Later on, all we asked was to be tolerated. We had looked at over twenty places, before we found one we could make do—two rooms facing north in a small house in Chichao Street. The owner of the house was a small official, but an intelligent man, who only occupied the central and side rooms. His household consisted simply of a wife, a baby a few months old, and a maid from the country. As long as the child didn't cry, it would be very quiet.

Our furniture, simple as it was, had already taken the greater part of the money I had raised; and Tzu-chun had sold her only gold ring and ear-rings too. I tried to stop her, but she insisted, so I didn't press the point. I knew, if she hadn't a share in our home, she would feel uncomfortable.

She had already quarrelled with her uncle—in fact he was so angry that he had disowned her. And I had broken with several friends who thought they were giving me good advice but were actually afraid for me, or jealous. Still, this meant we were very quiet. Although it was nearly dark when I left the office, and the rickshaw man went so slowly, the time always came when we were together again. First we would look at each other in silence, then relax and talk intimately, and finally fall silent again, bowing our heads without thinking of anything in particular. Gradually I was able to read her like a book, body and soul. In a mere three weeks I learned much more about her, and broke down barriers which I had not known to exist, but now discovered had been real barriers.

As the days passed, Tzu-chun became more lively. However, she didn't like flowers. I bought two pots of flowers at the fair, but after four days without watering they died neglected in a corner. I hadn't the time to see to everything. She had a liking for animals, though, which she may have picked up from the official's wife; and in less than a month our household was greatly increased. Four chicks of ours started picking their way across the courtyard with the landlady's dozen. But the two mistresses could tell them apart, each able to spot her own. Then there was a spotted Pekinese, bought at the fair. I believe he had a name to begin with, but Tzu-chun gave him a new one—Ahsui. And I called him Ahsui too, though I didn't like the name.

It is true that love must be constantly renewed, must grow and create. When I spoke of this to Tzu-chun, she nodded understandingly.

What peaceful, happy evenings those were!

Tranquillity and happiness must be consolidated, so that they may last forever. When we were in the hostel, we had occasional differences of opinion or misunderstandings; but after we moved into Chichao Street even these slight differences vanished. We just sat opposite each other in the lamplight, reminiscing, savouring again the joy of the new harmony which had followed our disputes.

Tzu-chun grew plumper and her cheeks became rosier; the only pity was she was too busy. Her housekeeping left her no time even to chat, much less to read or go out for walks. We often said we would have to get a maid.

Another thing that upset me when I got back in the evening, was to see her try to hide a look of unhappiness or—and this depressed me even more—force a smile onto her face. Luckily I discovered this was owing to her secret feud with the petty official's wife, and the bone of contention was the chicks. But why wouldn't she tell me? People ought to have a home of their own. This was no place to live in.

I had my routine too. Six days of the week I went from home to the office and from the office home. In the office I sat at my desk copying official documents and letters. At home I kept her company or helped her light the stove, cook rice or steam bread. This was when I learned to cook.

Still, I ate much better than when I was in the hostel. Although cooking was not Tzu-chun's strongest point, she threw herself into it heart and soul. Her ceaseless anxieties on this score made me anxious too, and in this way we shared the sweet and the bitter together. She kept at it so hard all day, perspiration made her short hair stick to her head, and her hands grew rough.

And then she had to feed Ahsui and the chicks . . . she would let nobody else do this for her.

I told her, I would rather not eat than see her work herself to the bone like this. She just gazed at me without a word, rather wistfully; and I couldn't very well say any more. But she went on working as hard as ever.

Finally the blow I had been expecting fell. The evening before the Double Tenth Festival, I was sitting idle while she was washing the dishes, when we heard a knock on the door. When I went to open it, I found the messenger from our office who handed me a mimeographed slip of paper. I guessed what it was, and when I took it to the lamp, sure enough, it read:

By order of the commissioner, Shih Chuan-sheng is discharged.

The secretariat.

October 9th.

I had foreseen this while we were still in the hostel. That Face Cream was one of the gambling friends of the commissioner's son. She was bound to spread rumours and try to make trouble. I was only surprised this hadn't happened sooner. In fact this was really no blow, because I had already decided I could work as a clerk somewhere else or teach, or, although it was a little more difficult, do some translation work. I knew the editor of *Freedom's Friend,* and had corresponded with him a couple of months previously. But all the same, my heart was thumping. What distressed me most was that even Tzu-chun, fearless as she was, had turned pale. Recently she seemed to have grown weaker.

"What does it matter?" she said. "We'll make a new start, won't we? We'll. . . ."

She didn't finish, and her voice sounded flat. The lamplight seemed unusually dim. Men are really laughable creatures, so easily upset by trifles. First we gazed at each other in silence, then started discussing what to do. Finally we decided to live as economically as possible on the money we had, to advertize in the paper for a post as clerk or teacher, and to write at the same time to the editor of *Freedom's Friend,* explaining my present situation and asking him to accept a translation to help me out of this difficulty.

"As good said as done! Let's make a fresh start."

I went straight to the table and pushed aside the bottle of vegetable oil and dish of vinegar, while Tzu-chun brought over the dim lamp. First I drew up the advertisement; then I made a selection of books to translate. I hadn't looked at my books since we moved house, and each volume was thick with dust. Finally I wrote the letter.

I hesitated for a long time over the wording of the letter, and when I stopped writing to think, and glanced at her in the dusky lamplight, she was looking very wistful again. I had never imagined a trifle like this could cause such a striking change in someone so firm and fearless as Tzu-chun. She really had grown much weaker lately—it wasn't something that had just started that evening. This made me feel more put out. I had a sudden vision of a peaceful life—the quiet of my shabby room in the hostel flashed before my eyes, and I was just going to take a good look at it when I found myself back in the dusky lamplight again.

After a long time the letter was finished. It was very lengthy, and I was so tired after writing it, I realized I must have grown weaker myself lately too. We decided to send in the advertisement and post the letter the next day. Then with one accord we straightened up, silently, as if conscious of each other's fortitude and strength, and able to see new hope growing from this fresh beginning.

Our new spirit was actually a reaction to the blow from outside. In the office I had lived like a wild bird in a cage, given just enough canary-seed by its captor to keep alive, but not to grow fat. And as time passed it would lose the use of its wings, so that if ever it were let out of the cage it could no longer fly. Now, at any rate, I had got out of the cage, and must soar anew in the wide sky before it was too late, while I could still flap my wings.

Of course we could not expect results from the advertisement right away. However, translating is not so simple either. You read something and think you understand it, but when you come to translate it difficulties crop up everywhere, and it's very slow going. Still, I determined to do my best. In less than a fortnight, the edge of a fairly new dictionary was black with my finger-prints, which shows how seriously I took my work. The editor of *Freedom's Friend* had said that his magazine would never ignore a good manuscript.

Unfortunately, there was no room where I could be undisturbed, and Tzu-chun was not as quiet or considerate as she had been. Our room was so cluttered up with dishes and bowls and filled with smoke, it was impossible to work steadily there. But of course I had only myself to blame for this—it was my fault for not being able to afford a study. On top of this there was Ahsui and the chicks. And the chicks had grown into hens now, and were more of a bone of contention than ever between the two families.

Then there was the never-ending business of eating every day. All Tzu-chun's efforts seemed to be devoted to our meals. One ate to earn, and earned to eat; while Ahsui and the hens had to be fed too. Apparently she had forgotten all she had ever learned, and did not realize that she was interrupting my train of thought when she called me to meals. And although I sometimes showed a little displeasure as I sat down, she paid no attention at all, just went on munching away quite unconcerned.

It took her five weeks to learn that my work could not be restricted by regular eating hours. When she did realize it she was probably annoyed, but she said nothing. After that my work did go forward faster, and soon I had translated 50,000 words. I had only to polish the manuscript, and it could be sent in with two already completed shorter pieces to *Freedom's Friend*. Those meals were still a headache though. It couldn't be helped that the dishes were cold, but there wasn't enough of them. My appetite was much smaller than before, now that I was sitting at home all day using my brain, but even so there wasn't always even enough rice. It had been given to Ahsui, sometimes along with the mutton which I myself rarely had a chance of eating recently. She said Ahsui was so thin, it was really pathetic, and it made the landlady sneer at us. She couldn't stand being laughed at.

So there were only the hens to eat my leftovers. It was a long time before I realized this. I was very conscious, however, that my "place in the universe," as Huxley describes it, was only somewhere between the Pekinese and the hens.

Later on, after much argument and insistence, the hens started appearing on our table, and we and Ahsui were able to enjoy them for over ten days. They were very thin, though, because for a long time they had only been fed a few grains of kaoliang a day. After that life became much more peaceful. Only Tzu-chun was very dispirited, and seemed so sad and bored without them, she grew rather sulky. How easily people change!

However, Ahsui too would have to be given up. We had stopped hoping for a letter from anywhere, and for a long time Tzu-chun had had no food left to get the dog to beg or stand on his hind legs. Besides, winter was coming on very fast, and we didn't know what to do about a stove. His appetite had long been a heavy liability, and now we found it beyond our power to feed him. So even the dog had to go.

If we had tied a tag to him and taken him to the fair to sell, we might have made a few coppers. But neither of us could bring ourselves to do this.

Finally I muffled his head in a cloth and took him outside the West Gate where I let him loose. When he ran after me, I pushed him into a pit that wasn't too deep.

When I got home, I found it more peaceful; but I was quite taken aback by Tzu-chun's tragic expression. I had never seen her so woebegone. Of course, it was because of Ahsui, but why take it so to heart? And I hadn't told her about pushing him into the pit.

That night, something icy crept into her expression too.

"Really!" I couldn't help saying. "What's got into you today, Tzu-chun?"

"What?" She didn't even look at me.

"You look so. . . ."

"It's nothing—nothing at all."

Eventually I realized she must consider me callous. Actually, when I was on my own I had got along very well, although I was too proud to mix much in society. But since my move I had become estranged from all my old friends. Still, if I could only get away from all this, there were plenty of ways open to me. Now I had to put up with all these hardships largely for her sake—even getting rid of Ahsui was because of her.

But Tzu-chun seemed too obtuse now to understand that.

When I took an opportunity to hint this to her, she nodded as if she understood. But judging by her later behaviour, she either didn't take it in or else didn't believe me.

The cold weather and her cold looks made it impossible for me to be comfortable at home. But where could I go? I could get away from her icy looks in the street and parks, but the cold wind outside just whistled through you. Finally I found a haven in the public library.

Admission was free, and there were two stoves in the reading room. Although the fire was very low, the mere sight of the stoves made one warm. There were no books worth reading: the old ones were out of date, and there were practically no new ones.

But I didn't go there to read. There were usually a few other people there, sometimes as many as a dozen, all thinly clad like me. We kept up a pretence of reading, in order to keep out of the cold. This suited me down to the ground. You were liable to meet people you knew on the road who would glance at you contemptuously, but here there was no trouble of that kind, because my acquaintances were all gathered round other stoves or warming themselves at the fires in their own homes.

Although there were no books for me to read there, I found quiet in which to think. As I sat there alone thinking over the past, I felt that during the last half year for love—blind love—I had neglected all the important things in life. First and foremost, livelihood. A man must make a living before there can be any place for love. There must be a way out for those who struggle, and I hadn't yet forgotten how to flap my wings, though I was much weaker than before. . . .

The room and the readers gradually faded. I saw fishermen in the angry sea, soldiers in the trenches, dignitaries in their cars, speculators at the stock exchange, heroes in mountain forests, teachers on their platforms, night prowlers, thieves in the dark. . . . Tzu-chun was far away. She had lost all her courage in her resentment over Ahsui and absorption in her cooking. The strange thing was that she hadn't lost any weight. . . .

It grew colder. The few lumps of slow-burning hard coal in the stove had at last burnt out, and it was closing time. I had to go back to Chichao Street, to expose myself to that icy look. Of late I had sometimes been met with warmth, but this only upset me more. I remember one evening, from Tzu-chun's eyes flashed the childlike look I had not seen for so long, as she reminded me with a smile of something that had happened at the hostel. But there was a constant look of fear in her eyes too. The fact that I had treated her more coldly recently than she had me worried her. Sometimes I forced myself to talk and laugh to comfort her. But the emptiness of my laughter and speech, and the way it immediately re-echoed in my ears like a hateful sneer, was more than I could bear.

Tzu-chun may have felt it too, for after this she lost her wooden calm and, though she tried her best to hide it, often showed anxiety. She treated me, however, much more tenderly.

I wanted to speak to her plainly, but hadn't the courage. Whenever I made up mind to speak, the sight of those childlike eyes compelled me, for the time being, to smile. But my smile turned straightway into a sneer at myself, and made me lose my composure.

After that she revived the old questions and started new tests, forcing me to give all sorts of hypocritical answers to show my affection for her. Hypocrisy became branded on my heart, so filling it with falseness it was hard to breathe. I often felt, in my depression, that really great courage was needed to tell the truth; for a man who lacked courage and reconciled himself to hypocrisy would never find a new path. What's more, he just could not exist.

Then Tzu-chun started looking resentful. This happened for the first time one bitterly cold morning, or so I imagined. I smiled secretly to myself with cold indignation. All the ideas and intelligent, fearless phrases she had learnt were empty after all. Yet she did not realize their emptiness. She had given up reading long ago, and did not realize the first thing in life is to make a living, that to do this people must advance hand in hand, or go forward singly. All she could do was cling to someone else's clothing, making it difficult even for a fighter to struggle, and bringing ruin on both.

I felt that our only hope lay in parting. She ought to make a clean break. Suddenly I thought of her death, but immediately was ashamed and reproached myself. Happily it was morning, and there was plenty of time for me to convince her. Whether or not we could make a fresh start depended on this.

I deliberately brought up the past. I spoke of literature, then of foreign authors and their works, of *Nora* and *The Woman of the Sea*. I praised Nora for being strong-minded. . . . All this had been said the previous year in the shabby room in the hostel, but now it rang hollow. As the words left my mouth I could not free myself from the suspicion that there was an unseen urchin behind me maliciously parrotting all I said.

She listened, nodding in agreement, then was silent. I finished what I had to say abruptly, and my voice died away in the emptiness.

"Yes," she said after another silence, "but . . . Chuan-sheng, I feel you've changed a lot lately. Is it true? You tell me honestly."

This was a blow, but I took a grip of myself, and explained my views and proposals: make a fresh start and turn over a new leaf, to avoid being ruined together.

To clinch the matter, I said firmly:

" . . . Besides, you need have no more scruples but go boldly ahead. You asked me to tell the truth. Yes, we shouldn't be hypocritical. Well, to tell the truth—it's because I don't love you any more! Actually, this makes it better for you, because it'll be easier for you to work without any regret. . . ."

I was expecting a scene, but all that followed was silence. Her face turned ashy pale, like a corpse; but in a moment her colour came back, and that childlike look darted from her eyes. She looked all round, like a hungry child searching for its kind mother, but only looked into space. She fearfully avoided my eyes.

The sight was more than I could stand. Fortunately it was still early. I braved the cold wind to hurry to the library.

There I saw *Freedom's Friend,* with all my translations in it. This took me by surprise, and seemed to bring me new life. "There are plenty of ways open to me," I thought. "But things can't go on like this."

I started calling on old friends with whom I had had nothing to do for a long time, but didn't go more than once or twice. Naturally, their rooms were warm, but I felt chilled to the marrow there. And in the evenings I huddled in a room colder than ice.

An icy needle was piercing my heart, making me suffer continually from numb wretchedness. "There are plenty of ways open to me," I thought. "I haven't forgotten how to flap my wings." Suddenly I thought of her death, but immediately was ashamed and reproached myself.

In the library I often saw like a flash a new path ahead of me. She had faced up bravely to the facts and boldly left this icy home. Left it, what was more, without any malice towards me. Then I felt light as a cloud floating in the void, with the blue sky above and high mountains and great oceans below, big buildings and skyscrapers, battlefields, motorcars, stock exchanges, rich men's houses, bright, bustling markets, and the dark night. . . .

What's more, I really felt this new life was just round the corner.

Somehow we managed to live through the bitter Peking winter. But we were like dragonflies that had fallen into the hands of some cruel children, to be tied with threads and played with and tormented at will. Although we had come through alive, we were prostrate, and the end was only a matter of time.

Three letters had been sent to the editor of *Freedom's Friend* before he replied. The envelope contained two book tokens, one for twenty cents, one for thirty cents. But I had spent nine cents on postage to press for payment, and gone hungry for a whole day, all for nothing.

However, I felt that at last I had got what I expected.

Winter was giving place to spring, and the wind was not quite so icy now. I spent more time wandering outside, and did not generally get home till dusk. One dark evening, I came home listlessly as usual and, as usual, grew even more depressed at the sight of our gate and slowed down. Eventually, however, I reached my room. It was dark inside, and as I groped for the matches to strike a light, the place seemed extraordinarily quiet and empty.

I was standing there in bewilderment, when the official's wife called to me through the window.

"Tzu-chun's father came today," she said simply, "and took her away."

This was not what I had expected. I felt as if hit on the back of the head, and stood speechless.

"She went?" I finally managed to ask.

"Yes."

"Did—did she say anything?"

"No. Just asked me to tell you when you came back that she had gone."

I couldn't believe it; yet the room was so extraordinarily quiet and empty. I looked everywhere for Tzu-chun, but all I could see was the old, discoloured furniture which appeared very scattered, to show that it was incapable of hiding anyone or anything. It occurred to me she might have left a letter, but no. Only salt, dried paprika, flour and half a cabbage had been placed together, with a few dozen coppers at the side. These were all our worldly goods, and now she had carefully left all this to me, bidding me without words to use this to eke out my existence a little longer.

Feeling my surroundings pressing in on me, I hurried out to the middle of the courtyard, where all around was dark. Bright lamplight showed on the window paper of the central rooms, where they were teasing the baby to make her laugh. My heart grew calmer, and I began to glimpse a way out of this heavy oppression: high mountains and great marshlands, stock exchanges, brightly lit feasts, trenches, pitch-black night, the thrust of a sharp knife, noiseless footsteps. . . .

I relaxed, thought about travelling expenses, and sighed.

I conjured up a picture of my future as I lay with closed eyes, but before the night was half over it had vanished. In the gloom I suddenly seemed to see a pile of groceries, then Tzu-chun's ashen face appeared to gaze at me beseechingly with childlike eyes. But as soon as I took a grip on myself, there was nothing there.

However, my heart still felt heavy. Why couldn't I have waited a few days instead of blurting out the truth like that to her? Now she knew all that was left to her was the sternness of her father—who was strict with all his children—and the icy cold looks of bystanders. Apart from this there was only emptiness. How terrible to bear the heavy burden of emptiness, treading out one's life amid sternness and cold looks! And at the end not even a tombstone to your grave!

I shouldn't have told Tzu-chun the truth. Since we had loved each other, I should have gone on lying to her. If truth is a treasure, it shouldn't have proved such a heavy burden of emptiness to Tzu-chun. Of course, lies are empty too, but at least they wouldn't have proved so crushing a burden in the end.

I thought if I told Tzu-chun the truth, she could go forward boldly without scruples, just as when we started living together. But I must have been wrong. Her fearlessness then was owing to love.

I hadn't the courage to shoulder the heavy burden of hypocrisy, so I thrust the burden of the truth onto her. Because she had loved me, she had to bear this heavy burden, amid sternness and cold glances to the end of her days.

I had thought of her death. . . . I realized I was a weakling. I deserved to be cast out by the strong, no matter whether they were truthful or hypocritical. Yet she, from first to last, had hoped that I could live longer. . . .

I wanted to leave Chichao Street; it was too empty and lonely here. I thought, if once I could get away, it would be as if Tzu-chun were still at my side. Or at least as if she were still in town, and might drop in on me any time, like when I lived in the hostel.

However, all my applications for jobs and letters went unanswered. There was nothing for it but to go to see an acquaintance I hadn't visited for a long time. This was an old schoolmate of my uncle's, a very respectable scholar, who had lived in Peking for many years and had a wide circle of acquaintances.

The gatekeeper treated me scornfully—no doubt because my clothes were shabby—and only with difficulty was I admitted. My uncle's friend still remembered me, but treated me very coldly. He knew all about us.

"Obviously, you can't stay here," he said coldly, after I asked him to recommend me to a job somewhere else. "But where will you go? It's extremely difficult. That—er—that friend of yours, Tzu-chun, I suppose you know, is dead."

I was dumbfounded.

"Are you sure?" I finally blurted out.

He gave an artificial laugh. "Of course I am. My servant Wang Sheng comes from the same village as her family."

"But—how did she die?"

"Who knows? At any rate, she's dead."

I have forgotten how I took my leave and went home. I knew he wouldn't tell a lie. Tzu-chun would never be coming to see me again, as she had last year. Although she wanted to bear the burden of emptiness amid sternness and cold glances till the end of her days, it had been too much for her. Fate had decided that she should die knowing the truth I had told her —die unloved!

Obviously, I could not stay there. But where to go?

All around was a great void, quiet as death. I seemed to see the darkness before the eyes of every single person who died unloved, and to hear all the bitter and despairing cries of their struggle.

I was waiting for something new, something nameless and unexpected. But day after day passed in the same deadly quiet.

I went out now much less than before, sitting or lying in this great void, allowing this deathly quiet to eat away my soul. Sometimes the silence itself seemed afraid, seemed to recoil. And at such times there would flash up nameless, unexpected, new hope.

One overcast morning, when the sun was unable to struggle out from behind the clouds and the very air was tired, the patter of tiny feet and a snuffling sound made me open my eyes. A glance round the room revealed nothing, but when I looked down I saw a small creature running round—thin, covered with dust, more dead than alive. . . .

When I looked harder, my heart missed a beat. I jumped up.

It was Ahsui. He had come back.

I left Chichao Street not just because of the cold glances of my landlord and the maid, but largely on account of Ahsui. However, where to go? I realized, naturally, there were many ways open to me, and sometimes seemed to see them stretching before me. I didn't know, though, how to take the first step.

After much weighing of different possibilities, I decided the hostel was the only place where I could put up. Here is the same shabby room as before, the same wooden bed, half dead locust tree and wistaria. But what gave me love and life, hope and happiness before has vanished. There is nothing but emptiness, the empty existence I exchanged for the truth.

There are many ways open to me, and I must take one of them because I am still living. I still don't know, though, how to take the first step. Sometimes the way seems like a great, grey serpent, writhing and rushing at me. I wait and wait and watch it approach, but it always disappears suddenly in the darkness.

The early spring nights are as long as ever. I sit idly for a long time and recall a funeral procession I saw on the street this morning. There were paper figures and paper horses in front, and behind crying that sounded like singing. I see how clever they are —this is so simple.

Then Tzu-chun's funeral springs to my mind. She bore the heavy burden of emptiness alone, advancing down the long grey road, only to be swallowed up amid sternness and cold glances.

I wish we really had ghosts and there really were a hell. Then, no matter how the wind of hell roared, I would go to find Tzu-chun, to tell her of my remorse and grief, and beg her forgiveness. Otherwise, the poisonous flames of hell would surround me, and fiercely devour my remorse and grief.

In the whirlwind and flames I would put my arms round Tzu-chun, and ask her pardon, or try to make her happy. . . .

However, this is emptier than the new life. Now there is only the early spring night which is still as long as ever. Since I am living, I must make a fresh start. And the first step is just to describe my remorse and grief, for Tzu-chun's sake as well as for my own.

All I have is crying that sounds like singing as I mourn for Tzu-chun, burying her in oblivion.

I want to forget. For my own sake I don't want to remember the oblivion I gave Tzu-chun for her burial.

I must make a fresh start in life. I must hide the truth deep in my wounded heart, and advance silently, taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide.

October 21, 1925

FORGING THE SWORD

I

MEI Chien Chih had no sooner lain down to sleep beside his mother than rats, coming out to gnaw at the wooden lid of the pan, got on his nerves. He gave a few soft hoots, which had some effect to begin with, but later the rats simply ignored him, crunching and munching as they pleased. And he dared not make a lot of noise to drive them away, for fear of waking his mother who had so tired herself out during the day that she fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

After a long time things quietened down. He was about to sleep, when a sudden splash made him open his eyes again. At the same time he heard the rasping of claws scrabbling against earthenware.

"Good! Devil take you!" he thought. Delighted, he sat up quietly.

He got down from the bed, and picked his way by the light of the moon to behind the door, where he groped for the fire stick, lit a pine torch and lighted up the water container. Sure enough, a huge rat had fallen in. But since there was not much water left, it could not get out, and was just circling round, scrabbling at the side of the cistern.

"Serves you right!" When he thought that these were the creatures that gnawed the furniture every night and kept him awake with their noise, he was very pleased. He stuck the torch into a small hole in the mud wall, to enjoy the sight; but presently he was so revolted by its beady eyes, he reached for a stick and pushed the creature under the water. After a time he removed the stick and the rat, floating up, went on circling round and scrabbling at the side of the cistern again. Only it clutched less powerfully than before, and its eyes were under water—all that could be seen was the red tip of its small pointed nose, snuffling desperately.

Recently he had felt considerable dislike for red-nosed people. Yet now the sight of this small, pointed red nose struck him as pathetic, so he took the stick again and thrust it under the rat's belly. The rat clutched at it, and after recovering its breath clambered up it. When its whole body could be seen—sopping black fur, bloated belly, worm-like tail—it struck him again as disgusting and beastly, and he hastily shook the stick, so that the rat dropped back with a splash into the cistern, where he hit it several times over the head with the stick, to make it sink.

When the pine torch had been changed six times, the rat could no longer stir, and was just floating submerged in the middle of the jar, from time to time straining slightly towards the surface of the water. Once more Mei Chien Chih was seized with pity. He broke the stick in two, and with considerable difficulty fished the creature up and put it on the floor. To begin with, the rat didn't budge, then it took a breath; after a long time its four feet twitched and it turned over, as if wanting to stand up and make off. This gave Mei Chien Chih a turn, and without thinking he raised his left foot and brought it heavily down. There was a squelching sound. When he squatted down to look, there was fresh blood at the corner of the rat's mouth—it was probably dead.

He felt very sorry for it again, and as miserable as if he had done something really criminal. He squatted there, staring, unable to get up.

By this time his mother was awake.

"What are you doing, son?" she asked from the bed.

"A rat. . . ." He got hastily to his feet and turned round, answering briefly.

"A rat, yes. I know. But what are you doing? Killing it, or saving it?"

He made no answer. The torch had burnt out. He stood there silently in the darkness, accustoming his eyes to the pale light of the moon.

His mother sighed.

"After midnight you'll be sixteen, but you're still so soft. You don't change at all. It looks as if your father will have no one to avenge him."

Sitting in the grey moonlight his mother seemed to be trembling all over, and in her low tones was such infinite grief, it made him shiver. The next moment he felt hot blood racing through his body.

"Avenge father? Does he need avenging?" he demanded in amazement, stepping forward.

"He does. And you must do it. I wanted to tell you long ago, but you were too small, so I said nothing. Now you're not a child any more, yet you still act like one. I just don't know what to do. How can a boy like you carry off a real man's job?"

"I can. Tell me, Mother. I'm going to change. . . ."

"Of course. I can only tell you. And you'll have to change. . . . Well, come over here."

He walked over. His mother was sitting stiffly on the bed, her eyes flashing in the shadowy white moonlight.

"Listen!" she said gravely. "Your father was famed for the swords he forged—he was the best smith in the land. I've sold all his tools to keep us from starving, so there's nothing left for you to see. But he was the best sword maker in the whole world. Twenty years ago, the king's concubine gave birth to a piece of iron. They said she conceived after embracing an iron pillar. It was pure, transparent iron. The king realized this was a rare treasure, and decided to have it made into a sword with which he could defend his kingdom, kill his enemies and safeguard himself. As ill luck would have it, your father was chosen for the task, and he brought the iron home. He tempered it day and night for three whole years, until he had forged two swords.

"The day that he opened his furnace for the last time, a most frightening thing happened! A column of white vapour billowed into the air, and the earth shook. The white vapour changed into a white cloud which covered this spot, then gradually turned a deep red and cast a rosy light over everything. In our pitch black furnace lay two red hot swords. As your father sprinkled them slowly with clear well water, the swords hissed and spat, and gradually turned grey. After this had gone on for seven days and seven nights, the swords disappeared. Only if you looked carefully could you see that they were still in the furnace, pure and transparent as two icicles.

"A look of great happiness flashed from your father's eyes. He picked up the swords and stroked them again and again. Then lines of sadness appeared on his forehead and at the corners of his mouth. He put the swords in two caskets.

" 'You've only to look at the portents there have been the last few days, to realize that everybody must know the swords are forged,' he told me softly. 'Tomorrow I must go to present a sword to the king. But the day that I present it will be the last day of my life. I'm afraid we shall never meet again.'

"Horrified, I wasn't sure what he meant, and didn't know what to say. 'You've done this work so well,' was all I found to murmur.

" 'Ah! You don't understand!' he exclaimed. 'The king has always been very suspicious and cruel. Now I've forged him a sword the equal of which has never been seen; he's bound to kill me, so that I can never forge one for anyone else to come and rival him or surpass him.'

"I shed tears.

" 'You mustn't be unhappy,' he said. 'There's no way out of this. Tears can't wash away fate. I've been preparing for this a long time.' His eyes seemed to dart lightning, as he placed a casket with one of the swords in it on my knee. 'This is one of the pair,' he told me. 'You keep it. Tomorrow I shall take its fellow to present to the king. If I don't come back, you'll know I'm dead. Won't you be brought to bed in four or five months? Don't be unhappy, but bear our child and bring him up well. As soon as he's grown up, give him this sword, and tell him to cut off the king's head with it, to avenge me!' "

"Did my father come back that day?" demanded the boy hastily.

"He did not!" she replied calmly. "I asked everywhere, but there was no news of him. Later someone told me that the first to stain with his blood the sword forged by your father was your father himself. For fear his ghost should haunt the palace, they buried his body at the front gate and his head in the back garden!"

Mei Chien Chih's whole body seemed burnt by a fierce fire, and he felt there must be sparks flashing from every hair on his head. He clenched his fists in the dark till the knuckles cracked.

His mother stood up, and lifted aside the board at the head of the bed. Then she lit a torch, took a farm tool from behind the door and handed it to her son, saying "Dig!"

The lad's heart was pounding, but he dug calmly away, stroke after stroke. He scooped out brown earth till he had dug down over five feet, when the colour of the earth changed, as if there were some rotten wood in it.

"Look! Careful now!" exclaimed his mother.

Mei Chien Chih crouched beside the hole he had made, and stretched down his hand. Very gingerly he shifted the rotted wood until the tip of his finger touched something as cold as ice; and the pure, transparent sword appeared. He made out where the hilt was, grasped it, and lifted it out.

The moon and stars outside the window and the pine torch inside the room suddenly seemed to lose their brightness, and the world to be filled with a steely light. And in this steely light the sword dissolved and apparently disappeared. But when the lad looked closely he saw something over five feet long, which didn't look particularly sharp—in fact the blade was rounded like a leek.

"You've got to stop being soft now," said his mother, "and take this sword to avenge your father!"

"I've already stopped being soft. I'll take this sword to avenge my father!"

"I hope so. You'd better put on a grey coat, and strap the sword to your back. With coat and sword the same colour, nobody'll be able to see it. I've already got the coat ready for you here." His mother pointed at the shabby chest behind the bed. "Tomorrow you can set out. Don't worry about me."

Mei Chien Chih took out the new coat and found, when he tried it on, that it fitted him perfectly. Then he folded it up again, wrapped up the sword, placed it by his pillow, and lay down calmly. He believed he had already stopped being soft. He determined to act as if he had nothing on his mind, to fall straight asleep, and to wake the next morning looking as usual, then set out confidently in search of his mortal enemy.

However, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned, and kept wanting to sit up. He heard his mother's long, soft, hopeless sighs. Then he heard the first crow of the cock and knew that a new day had come, and he was sixteen.

II

When Mei Chien Chih crossed the threshold without a look behind, there was as yet no light in the east. His eyes swollen, dressed in the grey coat with the sword on his back, he strode swiftly toward the city. The night air still hid in the dew that clung to the tips of the leaves in the pine wood. But by the time he reached the other end of the forest, the dew drops were sparkling brightly, and dawn had broken. Far ahead he thought he could see the dark grey, crenellated walls of the city.

Mingling with the vegetable vendors, he entered the city where the streets were already full of bustle and activity. Men were standing about idly in groups, while every now and then women looked out from their doors. Most of their eyes were still swollen from sleep too, their hair was uncombed, and their faces were pale as they had had no time to put on rouge.

Mei Chien Chih sensed that something big was about to happen, something which all these people were eagerly yet patiently awaiting.

As he advanced, a child darted over and almost knocked into the point of the sword on his back, making him break into a cold sweat. Turning north, not far from the palace, he found the people packed closely together, craning their necks toward the road. The cries of women and children could be heard from the crowd. Afraid his invisible sword might hurt someone, he dared not push his way forward; but people were pressing up from behind. He had to move out of their way, till all he could see was the backs of people in front of him, craning their necks.

All of a sudden, the people in front knelt down one after the other; in the distance he could see two riders galloping forward side by side. They were followed by warriors carrying batons, spears, swords, bows and flags, who raised a cloud of dust. After them came a large cart drawn by four horses, in which sat a band sounding gongs and drums, and blowing some strange musical instruments. Behind were carriages with courtiers in bright clothes, old men or short, pursy fellows, their faces glistening with perspiration. These were followed by a troop of riders bearing swords, spears and halberds. Then the kneeling people prostrated themselves. Mei Chien Chih saw a great carriage with a yellow canopy drive up, in the middle of which was seated a fat man in bright clothes. He had a grizzled beard and small head, and seemed to be wearing at his side a sword like the one on his own back.

The lad gave an instinctive shudder, but immediately was afire again, as if flames were burning him. Stretching his hand to grip the sword on his back, he picked his way forward between the necks of the kneeling crowd.

But he had only taken five or six steps when someone tripped him up and made him fall headlong on top of a young fellow with a wizened face. He was afraid the point of his sword might have hurt him, and was getting up nervously to see, when he received two hard punches in the ribs. Without stopping to protest he looked again at the road, but not only had the carriage with the yellow canopy passed, even the mounted attendants behind it were already some distance away.

The people on both sides of the road got up again. The youngster with the wizened face had kept hold of Mei Chien Chih's collar, and wouldn't let him go. He accused him of crushing his solar plexus, and ordered him to guarantee that if he died before he was eighty, the boy would pay for it. Idlers crowded round to gape, but none of them said anything; then a few bystanders let fall some jokes and curses, taking the side of the wizened young man. In face of such enemies, Mei Chien Chih didn't know whether to laugh or lose his temper. It was annoying, yet he couldn't get away.

This went on for the time it takes to cook a pan of millet. By then Mei Chien Chih was afire with impatience, yet still the onlookers did not disperse, but went on watching as avidly as ever.

Then a dark man pushed his way through the knot of people. He had black hair, black eyes, and was as lean as a rake. Without a word, he smiled coldly at Mei Chien Chih, and raised his hand to flick the jaw of the youngster with the wizened face, and looked steadily into his eyes. The youngster returned his stare for a time, then slowly let go of the boy's collar, and made off. The dark man made off too, and the crowd drifted disappointed away. Only a few people came up to ask Mei Chien Chih his age and address, and whether he had sisters at home. But Mei Chien Chih ignored them.

He walked south, thinking since there was so much bustle and activity in the city it would be easy to wound someone by accident, and he would do better to wait outside the south gate for the king to come back, and then avenge his father. There was plenty of space there, and not too many people; it was really the best place for what he had to do. By now all the citizens were discussing the king's trip to the mountain, his retinue, his majesty, what an honour it was for them to see the king, how low some had prostrated themselves, and how they should be considered as exemplary citizens. They were buzzing about like bees. Only near the south gate did things become quieter.

He walked out of the city and sat under a big mulberry tree, where he ate two rolls. As he was eating he thought of his mother, and felt a lump in his throat, but presently that passed. All around grew quieter and quieter, until he could hear his own breathing quite distinctly.

As dusk fell, he grew more and more uneasy, and strained his eyes ahead, but not a sign could he see of the king. The villagers who had taken vegetables to the city to sell were one by one going home with empty baskets.

Long after all these peasants had passed, the dark man came quickly out from the city.

"Run, Mei Chien Chih! The king is after you," he said. His voice was like the cry of an owl.

Mei Chien Chih trembled from head to foot. Then, as if under a spell, he followed the dark man, and presently they were running at full speed. He stopped to pant for a while before he realized they had reached the edge of the pine wood. Far behind were silver rays, where the moon was rising; but in front all that could be seen were the dark man's eyes blazing like will-o'-the-wisps.

"How did you know me? . . ." the lad asked in fear and amazement.

"I've always known you." The man laughed. "I know you carry a sword on your back to avenge your father. And I know you will fail. Not only will you fail to avenge him, but today someone has informed against you. Your enemy went back to the palace long ago by the east gate, and has issued an order for your arrest."

Mei Chien Chih began to feel wretched.

"Oh, no wonder Mother sighed," he muttered.

"But she only knows half. She doesn't know that I'm going to take vengeance for you."

"You? Are you willing to take vengeance for me, sir knight?"

"Ah, don't insult me by calling me that."

"Well then, is it because you sympathize with widows and orphans?"

"Don't use names that have been sullied, child," he said sternly. "Knighthood, sympathy and all the rest used to be clean, but now they've become capital for usurers. I set no store by these things. I only want to avenge you!"

"Good. But how will you do it?"

"I only want two things from you." His voice sounded from beneath two burning eyes. "What two things? I'll tell you: one is your sword, the other is your head!"

Although Mei Chien Chih thought the request strange and hesitated, he was not afraid. But for a moment he remained speechless.

"Don't be afraid that I want to trick you out of your life and your treasure." The voice sounded sternly again in the dark. "It's entirely up to you. If you trust me, I'll go to kill the king; if you don't, I won't."

"But why are you going to take vengeance for me? Did you know my father?"

"I knew your father all along, just as I've always known you. But that's not why I want to take vengeance. You don't understand, my boy, how good I am at revenge. What's yours is mine, and what concerns others concerns me too. I bear on my soul so many wounds inflicted both by others and by myself, that I already hate myself!"

As soon as the voice in the dark stopped, Mei Chien Chih raised his hand to grasp the grey sword on his back and with the same movement swung it forward from the nape of his neck, so that his head fell on the green moss at his feet even as he handed the sword to the dark man.

"Ah!" He took the sword with one hand, and with the other picked up Mei Chien Chih's head by its hair. He kissed the warm, dead lips twice, and gave a cold, shrill laugh.

His laughter spread straightway through the pine wood, and immediately, deep in the forest, flashed blazing eyes, which, in a second, came so close that you could hear the snuffling of hungry wolves. With one bite Mei Chien Chih's clothes were torn completely off him; with another, his whole body disappeared, and the blood was instantaneously licked clean, while all that could be heard was the soft crunching of bones.

The huge wolf at the head of the pack hurled itself at the dark man. But with one sweep of the grey sword, its head fell on the green moss at his feet. The other wolves with one bite tore off its skin, with another its whole body disappeared, and the blood was instantaneously licked clean, while all that could be heard was the soft crunching of bones.

The dark man picked up the grey coat from the ground to wrap up Mei Chien Chih's head, and fastened this and the grey sword onto his back. Then he turned on his heel, and swung off through the darkness toward the capital.

The wolves stood stock-still, hunched up with lolling tongues, panting, watching him with green eyes as he strode away.

He swung through the darkness toward the capital, singing in a shrill voice as he went:

The single one who loved the sword
Has taken death as his reward.
Those who go single are galore,
Who love the sword are alone no more!
Foe for foe, ha! Head for head!
Two men by their own hands are dead.

III

The king could take no pleasure in his trip to the mountain; and the secret report that there was an assassin lying in wait for him made him go back feeling even more depressed. He was in a very bad temper that night, and complained that even the ninth concubine's hair was not as black and glossy as the day before. Fortunately, she perched herself affectionately on his royal knee, and wriggled specially over seventy times, until the wrinkles on his kingly brow were gradually smoothed out.

When the king got up after noon the next day he was in a rather bad mood again, and by the time he had had lunch, he was furious.

"I'm bored!" he bellowed, with a great yawn.

This threw everyone from the queen down to the court jester into a panic. The king had long been sick and tired of his old ministers' sermons and the clowning of his plump dwarfs; recently he had even been finding marvellous tricks like tightrope walking, pole climbing, juggling, somersaulting, sword swallowing and fire spitting quite insipid. He was given to bursts of rage, in which he would draw his sword and look for some trifling fault so that he could kill a few people.

Two eunuchs who had slipped out of the palace to play truant had just come back. When they saw the general air of gloom in the court, they knew that great trouble was brewing again, and one of them turned pale with fear. The other, however, looked very confident. He made his way unhurriedly to the king's presence, where he prostrated himself, and said:

"Your slave has just met a remarkable man with rare skill, who will be able to amuse Your Majesty. I have come to inform Your Majesty of this."

"What?!" The king never wasted words.

"He's a lean, dark fellow, who looks like a beggar. He's dressed in grey, has a round grey bundle on his back, and he keeps singing snatches of strange doggerel. Asked what he does, he says he can do a wonderful trick, the equal of which has never been seen—it has no match in the world. No one has ever seen the like before. The sight will put an end to care and bring peace to the world. But when people ask him to perform, he refuses. He says he must have first a golden dragon, second a golden cauldron. . . ."

"A golden dragon? That's me. A golden cauldron? I have one."

"That's just what I thought. . . ."

"Bring him in!"

Before the king's voice had died away, four guards hurried out with the eunuch. Everyone from the queen down to the court jester beamed with delight. They all hoped this conjuror could put an end to care and bring peace to the world. And even if the show fell flat, there would be the lean, dark beggarly looking fellow to bear the brunt of the royal displeasure. If they could last till he was brought in, all would be well.

Presently six men could be seen hurrying toward the throne. The eunuch led the way, the four guards brought up the rear, and in the middle was a dark man. As they drew near, it was seen that this man was wearing a grey coat, his beard, eyebrows and hair were black, and he was so thin that his cheekbones stood out and his eyes were sunken. As he knelt respectfully to prostrate himself, a small round bundle could be seen on his back, wrapped in grey cloth with a dark red pattern.

"Well!" shouted the king impatiently. This fellow's paraphernalia looked so simple, the king doubted whether he could do any good tricks.

"Your subject's name is Yen-chih-ao-che, born in Wenwen Village. I wasn't bred to any trade, but when I was grown I met a sage, who taught me to conjure with a child's head. I can't do this alone, though. It must be in the presence of a golden dragon, and I must have a golden cauldron, filled with clear water, heated with charcoal. Then when the child's head is put in, and the water boils, the head will rise and fall, and dance all manner of figures. It will make wonderful sounds too, and laugh and sing. Whoever hears its song and sees it dance will know an end to care, while if all the people see it, the whole world will have peace."

"Go ahead!" the king ordered loudly.

Before long a great golden cauldron, big enough to boil an ox, was set before the throne and filled with water, and charcoal was lit under it. The dark man stood at one side, and when he saw the charcoal was red he put down his bundle and undid it, then picked up the child's head in both hands, and held it high. It had fine eyebrows and brilliant eyes, white teeth and red lips, and a smile played round its mouth. Its tangled hair was like faint smoke. The dark man raised it high and turned round for all to see, then held it over the cauldron while he muttered something, and finally dropped it so that it fell with a splash into the water. Foam flew up at least five feet high, and after that all was still again.

For a long time nothing happened. The king grew impatient, and the queen and concubines, ministers and eunuchs began to feel alarmed, while the plump dwarfs were beginning to sneer. When the king saw their sneers, he felt he was being made a fool of, and turned to the guards, meaning to order them to have this oaf who dared deceive his monarch thrown into the great cauldron and boiled to death.

However, that very instant he heard the water bubbling; the charcoal was crackling away too and casting a ruddy glow over the dark man, so that he looked like iron that had turned a faint red. As soon as the king turned back again, the dark man lifted both hands towards the sky, stared into space, danced, and suddenly started singing in a shrill voice:

Sing hey for love, for love heigh ho!
Ah, love! Ah, blood! Who is not so?
Men grope in dark, the king laughs loud,
Ten thousand heads in death have bowed.
I only use one single head,
For one man's head let blood be shed!
Blood—let it flow!
Sing hey, sing ho!

As he sang, the water in the cauldron seethed up conewise like a small mountain; but from its tip to the bottom of the cauldron it remained flowing and eddying all the time. The head bobbed up and down with the water, skimming round and round, nimbly turning somersaults as it went, and people could make out a smile of pleasure on its face. After some time it gave this up to start swimming against the stream, circling, weaving to and fro, and splashing water in all directions so that hot drops showered the court. One of the dwarfs gave a sudden cry, and rubbed his nose. He had been scalded, and couldn't help crying out with the pain.

As soon as the dark man stopped singing, the head stopped in the middle of the water, facing the throne, assuming a grave expression. After staying like this for a few seconds, it began bobbing up and down slowly again. From bobbing it speeded up to swim up and down, not very quickly but extremely gracefully. It swam three times around the edge of the water, ducking up and down, then opened its eyes wide, the jet-black pupils looking unusually brilliant, as it opened its mouth to sing:

The sovereign's rule spreads far and wide,
He conquers foes on every side.
The world may end, but not his might,
So here I come all gleaming bright.
Bright gleams the sword—forget me not!
A royal sight, but sad my lot.
Sing hey, sing ho, a royal sight!
Come back, where gleams the bright grey light.

The head suddenly stopped at the crest of the water. Then, after turning several somersaults, it started plying up and down again, looking to right and to left very bewitchingly, as it sang once more:

Heigh ho, for the love we know!
I cut one head, one head, heigh ho!
I use one single head, not more,
The heads he uses are galore! . . .

By the fifth line of the song, the head was submerged, and since it did not come up again, the singing could not be heard distinctly. As the singing grew fainter, the seething water gradually sank back like an ebbing tide, until it was below the rim of the cauldron, so that from a distance nothing could be seen.

"Well?" demanded the king impatiently, after waiting for a little.

"Your Majesty," the dark man went down on one knee, "it's dancing the most miraculous circular dance at the bottom of the cauldron. This can't be seen except from close by. I've no power to make it come up, because this circular dance has to be done at the bottom of the cauldron."

The king stood up and strode down the steps to stand by the cauldron, regardless of the heat, bending forward to watch. The water was smooth as a mirror, and the head was lying there looking up, its two eyes fixed on the king. When the king's eyes lighted on its face, it gave a charming smile. This smile made the king feel they had met before, but he could not for the moment recall who this was. As he was wondering, the dark man drew the grey sword from his back, swept it forward like lightning from the nape of the king's neck, and the king's head fell with a splash into the cauldron.

When enemies meet, they know each other at a glance, particularly at close quarters. As soon as the king's head touched the water, Mei Chien Chih's head came up to meet it, and took a bite out of its ear. At once the water in the cauldron boiled, bubbling furiously; and the two heads started a fight to the death in the water. After about twenty encounters, the king's head was wounded in five places, and Mei Chien Chih's in seven. The crafty king contrived to slip up behind his enemy, and in an unguarded moment Mei Chien Chih let himself be caught at the back of his neck, so that he couldn't turn round. The king's head fastened its teeth into him and wouldn't let go, sinking its teeth deeper and deeper; and the child's cries of pain could be heard even outside the cauldron. Everybody from the queen down to the court jester, who had been petrified with fright before, was galvanized into life by this sound, and felt as sad as if the sun had been swallowed up in darkness. They were all over gooseflesh; but this was followed by a secret joy, as they stared round-eyed, as if in expectation of something.

The dark man seemed rather taken aback too but he did not change colour. Effortlessly he raised his arm like a withered branch holding the invisible sword, and stretched forward as if to peer into the cauldron. His arm suddenly bent, the sword thrust down swiftly from behind, and his severed head fell into the cauldron with a plop, sending snow white foam flying in all directions.

As soon as his head hit the water, it charged straight at the king's head, and took his nose between its teeth, practically biting it off. The king let out a cry of pain, and as he opened his mouth Mei Chien Chih's head managed to get away, whirling round to get a vice-like grip on his jaw. They not only held on tight, but pulled with all their might in opposite directions, tugging so that the king's head couldn't keep its mouth shut any more. Then they began biting at him furiously like famished hens pecking at rice, till the king's head was completely mauled, and bitten out of recognition. To begin with he could still roll frantically about in the cauldron, later he just lay there groaning, and finally he fell silent, at his last gasp.

The heads of the dark man and Mei Chien Chih gradually stopped biting, left the king's head and swam once round the edge of the cauldron, to see whether he was shamming or whether he was really dead. When they found that the king's head had really breathed its last, they exchanged glances and smiled, then closed their eyes, looked up at the sky, and sank to the bottom of the water.

IV

The fire went out, and the water stopped boiling. The extraordinary silence brought everybody in the court to their senses. Someone gave an exclamation, and at once they were all calling out in fright together. Then someone else walked over to the golden cauldron, and all the others pressed after him. Those crowded at the back could only peer between the necks of those in front.

The heat still scorched their faces. But the water in the cauldron was as smooth as a mirror, with a coating of oil on top, which reflected all their faces: the queen, concubines, guards, old ministers, dwarfs, eunuchs. . . .

"Heavens! Our great king's head is still in there! Oh dear, oh dear!" The sixth concubine burst into wild sobs.

Consternation seized them all, from the queen down to the court jester. They scattered in panic, at a complete loss, running round and round in circles. The wisest old councillor went forward alone, stretched out his hand to touch the side of the cauldron, then trembled all over, drew back his hand at once, and put two fingers to his mouth to blow on them again and again.

Pulling themselves together, they gathered outside the door to discuss how to fish the head out. They consulted together the time it would take to cook three pans of millet, and finally reached a conclusion: that was, to collect the wire scoops from the big kitchen, and order the guards to do their best to fish it out.

Soon the implements were ready: wire scoops, strainers, golden dishes and dusters were all placed by the cauldron. Then the guards rolled up their sleeves, some of them using the wire scoops, some the strainers, and set respectfully about fishing up the head. The scoops could be heard striking against each other and scraping the edge of the cauldron, while the water eddied about in their wake. After some time, one of the guards' faces grew suddenly grave, as he very carefully raised his scoop slowly in both hands. Drops of water like pearls dripped from the scoop, in which could be seen a snow white skull. All cried out with astonishment, and he deposited the skull on one golden dish.

"Oh dear! Our king!" The queen, concubines, ministers and even the eunuchs burst out sobbing. Presently, however, they stopped, because the guard had fished out another skull just like the first.

They looked dully round with tear-filled eyes, and saw the perspiring guards were still fishing. They fished out a tangled mass of white hair and black hair, and several spoonfuls of some very short hairs which looked like white beards and black beards. Then another skull. Then three hairpins.

They stopped only when nothing but clear soup was left in the cauldron. And they divided what they had salvaged onto three golden dishes; one dish of skulls, one dish of hair, one dish of hairpins.

"Our king only had one head. Which is the king's head?" demanded the ninth concubine frantically.

"Quite so. . . ." The ministers looked at each other in dismay.

"If the skin and flesh hadn't boiled away, it would be easy to tell," said one kneeling dwarf.

They forced themselves to examine the skulls dispassionately, but the size and colour were about the same, so that they couldn't even tell which was the boy's head. The queen said the king had a scar on his right temple as the result of a fall he had had when he was prince, and it might have left a trace on the skull. Sure enough, the dwarfs discovered such a mark on one of the skulls, and there was general rejoicing, until another dwarf discovered a similar mark on the right temple of a slightly yellower skull.

"I know!" exclaimed the third concubine happily. "Our king had a very high nose."

The eunuchs hastened to examine the noses, and found one of them was certainly relatively high, although there really wasn't much to choose between them; but the worst of it was that particular skull had no mark on the right temple.

"Besides," said the ministers to the eunuchs, "could the back of our king's skull have been so pointed?"

"We never paid any attention to the back of His Majesty's head. . . ."

The queen and the concubines started thinking back too; some said it was pointed, and some flat. When they called the eunuch who combed the royal hair, and questioned him, he wouldn't say anything.

That evening they held a meeting of princes and ministers to decide which head was the king's, but with no better result than during the day. In fact, even the hair and beards presented a problem. The white was of course the king's; but since his hair was grizzled, it was very difficult to decide about the black. They discussed for half the night, and had just set aside a few red hairs when the ninth concubine protested, because she was sure she had seen a few yellow hairs in the king's beard; in which case how could they be sure there was not a single red one? So they had to put them all together again, and leave the case unsettled.

They had still got nowhere by the early hours of the morning. They prolonged the discussion amid yawns till the cock crowed, before they fixed on a really safe and satisfactory solution. That was that all three heads should be placed in the golden coffin beside the king's body for burial.

The funeral took place a week later, and the whole city was agog. Citizens of the capital and people from far away flocked to watch the royal funeral. As soon as it was light, the road was packed with men and women; and sandwiched in between were tables with sacrificial offerings. In the middle of the morning horsemen cantered out to clear the roads. Some time later came a procession of flags, batons, spears, bows, halberds and the like, followed by four cartloads of musicians. Then, rising and falling with the irregularities of the ground, came a yellow canopy which drew gradually nearer, till it was possible to make out the hearse with the golden coffin, in which lay three heads and one body.

As the people knelt down, the rows of tables of offerings stood out among the crowd. Some loyal subjects were very indignant, and swallowed tears to think that the spirits of those two regicides must be enjoying the sacrifice now together with the king; but there was nothing they could do about it.

Then followed the carriages of the queen and concubines. The people looked at them, and they looked at the people, without stopping their wailing. After them came the ministers, eunuchs and dwarfs, all of whom had assumed a mournful air. But the people paid no attention to them, and their procession was already squeezed out of all semblance of order.

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LU HSUN: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

By FENG HSUEH-FENG

I

Lu Hsun was a great thinker in the field of enlightenment of the Chinese people's democratic revolution, one of the outstanding realists of the twentieth century, a great patriot and internationalist. His thought and writings developed along exactly the same path as the revolution of the Chinese people. The literary achievements that stand to his credit have a brilliant, unique and undying quality. They reach into the heart of Chinese culture, showing the ideals and noble characteristics of the Chinese people. At the same time they are permeated with profound revolutionary ideas and an indomitable fighting spirit, which reflect most sharply the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people against imperialism and feudalism and which have served that struggle in the most effective and practical way.

Lu Hsun, the pen-name of Chou Shu-jen, was born on September 25, 1881 in Shaohsing, a famous old city of Chekiang Province. When Lu Hsun was born, his grandfather, a *chinshih** of the Manchu court, was serving as an official in Peking, but was thrown into prison when the boy reached his thirteenth year. The family never recovered from the blow. Lu Hsun's father, a scholar who had never taken any official appointment, had always been a poor provider; moreover, he was seized with a serious illness about the time of the imprisonment of the *chinshih* and died after three years of failing health. Because of this, Lu Hsun's family was reduced to poverty. His mother, however, was a capable countrywoman of admirable character who had taught herself to read, and her generosity and indomitable character influenced Lu Hsun all through his life. Her maiden name was Lu, and it was from her that Lu Hsun derived his pen-name.

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* A degree conferred on those who passed the examination at the imperial court.

In his boyhood, Lu Hsun was noted among the members of his clan for his extraordinary intelligence. When he was six, he entered the school which his clan maintained for its own members, and began to study Chinese classics. He remained in Shaohsing until he was seventeen, and all this time never left the city except for a short stay in the country with his eldest uncle on the maternal side. According to his own account, other people's reminiscences and the materials we have gathered about his life, we have ample proof that Lu Hsun read a great number of Chinese classics during these twelve years. Not only did he have a photographic memory, but he often struck upon a new interpretation of the old text and had the courage to object to the old point of view and the traditional ethics of the feudal, patriarchal society. Meanwhile, apart from the so-called orthodox classics and histories, he showed an extraordinary interest in unofficial histories and collections of prose writings. He searched them out, read them and even copied them with remarkable diligence. In his youth Lu Hsun also took a great interest in tracking down the antiquities of Shaohsing, with reverence and love for the former illustrious scholars of his native prefecture. He was particularly zealous in gathering the writings of those poets, writers and learned men distinguished for their patriotism and opposition to tyranny, and this communion of spirit between him and the great personalities of his native place remained with him as a strong influence throughout his life.

Another factor in Lu Hsun's early life which exercised an important influence on both his character and his writing, was the opportunity he had to mingle in rural society. Some of his friends were the children of simple, honest peasant folk, with whom he formed noble and sincere friendships. As he grew older Lu Hsun recalled these contacts and friendships as the most beautiful episodes of his life. They were also important as the starting point of Lu Hsun's spiritual link with the toiling masses.

Young Lu Hsun also displayed a lively interest in folk art, such as New Year pictures, tales and legends, joss processions and sacrificial plays. The impression made upon him by the Shaohsing play of Mu-lien was particularly deep. This is a popular dramatic version of a Buddhist parable based upon Maudgalyayana's rescue of his mother from hell. It is well-known throughout China, but the staging and text vary in different localities. The Shaohsing version, acted in the dialect, is the richest in folk character and in content, and the most colourful, with an undercurrent of opposition to injustice and tyranny.

Young Lu Hsun was also fond of fine arts, particularly painting. He not only collected picture albums and illustrated books, but used to trace the pictures in his spare time.

Naturally, the education, occupations and contacts of his early youth laid in some measure the foundation for Lu Hsun's later contribution to literature and the revolution. But from the standpoint of the social development of the time, what impelled Lu Hsun to advance in the direction of revolution was the invasion of the country by foreign imperialism and the beginning of the collapse of Chinese feudal society. Since Lu Hsun was born forty years after the Opium War of 1840, and thirty years after the Taiping Revolution, in his youth China had already for a long time —ever since the Treaty of Nanking of 1842—been fettered by a series of aggressive imperialist treaties and reduced to the status of a semi-colony, a market with an "Open Door."

Lu Hsun's boyhood coincided with the period of intensified imperialist aggression, when the Manchu dynasty was becoming more and more corrupted and impotent. In a vain effort to prolong its rule, it was appeasing the foreign imperialists by yielding to them its own sovereignty and the territory of the country, while suppressing the patriotic struggle of the people. China had not only been reduced to a semi-colonial status, but was in imminent danger of being partitioned by imperialist powers.

Although the city in which Lu Hsun spent his youth was only remotely touched by outside influences, it could not fail to be shaken by the danger confronting Chinese society and the entire Chinese nation. The decay of the intellectual-official family into which he was born, coinciding, as it did, with intensified imperialist aggression and the tottering of feudal rule, enabled him all the more easily to recognise the state of society from his own personal experience. His sensitive response to his family environment broadened into a reaction to society and the country as a whole. From the age of thirteen to seventeen, owing to his family's poverty and his father's illness, Lu Hsun became familiar with pawnshops and pharmacies; and the cold stares that he received in these places left their mark upon him. The shocks that he sustained from his environment caused him to think more seriously with the result that he began to feel the oppression of a feudal, patriarchal society. Aware of its flaws and contradictions, he learned to despise and hate that society. The combination of feudalism with commercial capitalism had given rise to certain shallow, vulgar and anomalous cultural phenomena, still feudal in essence, which were more or less perceptible even in Shaohsing. These also aroused Lu Hsun's hatred. His scorn for the people around him increased day by day as he came to consider them a strange species. The feelings of young Lu Hsun were therefore in revolt against Shaohsing. He wanted to leave the place; and he refused to train to be a *yamen* clerk or business man, these being the occupations generally followed by the literate sons of the decayed families of Shaohsing. He insisted on treading a new path, though it was true that financial pressure was already forcing him to leave his family and find other means of livelihood.

Therefore, when Lu Hsun was eighteen, with the eight dollars his mother had managed to raise for his fare, he left for Nanking to take the entrance examination for the Naval Academy run by the Manchu Government. Here foreign science and technique were taught and no tuition fees were charged. He passed the examination, but was not satisfied with the institution. The following year he transferred to the School of Railways and Mines run in connection with the Kiangnan Army Academy (also in Nanking).

This institution of modern learning, however, did not please him either. But it was at the School of Railways and Mines that Lu Hsun became acquainted with ideas of constitutional reform (bourgeois reform and constitutional monarchy), and he read a number of translations of foreign literature and science, notably Yen Fu's translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics.*

Lu Hsun was in Nanking for four years. This was just at the time of Kang Yu-wei's reform programme of 1898, of the anti-imperialist Boxer Uprising with the subsequent invasion of Peking in 1900 by the allied armies of eight imperialist powers, and of the Boxer Protocol in 1901, when the crisis facing the country was one of life or death. Although the current ideas of constitutional reform had little influence on Lu Hsun, as he had recognised their inadequacy from the start, it was during these four years that his political consciousness was taking shape in the recognition of the need for a national revolution against imperialism and the Manchu dynasty. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* had a great influence on him at this period. It caused him not only to take Darwin's theory of evolution as his guide for many years after, but made him choose the study and promotion of science as the form of his own particular contribution to the national revolution.

In 1901, he graduated from the School of Railways and Mines, and the following year he obtained a government scholarship to study in Japan.

II

Directly he arrived in Japan, Lu Hsun's patriotic ideas became not only more fervent, but more far-reaching and comprehensive. Since the anti-Manchu patriotic movement among the Chinese students in Japan was at its height and Japan was rapidly advancing towards imperialism with all the airs of a bully, the fervour and indignation that Lu Hsun felt at conditions in his own country made him determine to devote his whole life to the restoration of the power and dignity of his native land. He was becoming just such a fighter of national revolution as indicated by the inscription on a photograph sent to a friend in 1903: "I offer my blood to Hsuan Yuan."* Nevertheless, he was extremely dissatisfied with the superficial and ineffectual ideas propounded by Chinese students in Japan and revolutionary thinkers in China, and in fact with all shallow, ill-conceived and reactionary theories and tendencies. Through voracious spare-time study of European science, philosophy and literature, and his eager search for the path to a national revolution, his understanding deepened until he attained to what was far beyond the comprehension of the general run of Chinese students abroad or most of the Chinese revolutionary thinkers of the time—the idea of a thorough-going bourgeois democratic revolution. He was helped to this conclusion by the progressive ideas of Darwin's theory of evolution and by the poets he idolised—Byron, Shelley, Heine, Pushkin, Lermontov, Mickiewicz and A. Petöfi.

The advanced ideas of these world-famed poets, who had advocated patriotic democratic revolution, were of great help to him. He came into contact with their works after he arrived in Japan where he read them in Japanese or, with difficulty, in German. His love for their revolutionary and patriotic spirit was one of the factors that made him turn to literature from the medical science that he had formerly decided upon as his lifework.

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* Mythical ancestor of the Chinese people.

After two years in preparatory school, he entered the Medical College of Sendai under the spur of his belief that scientific medicine would aid the revolutionary movement in China. But two years later, his faith was shaken, according to his own account, by a film shown in the classroom. It depicted an incident of the Russo-Japanese War in which the death agonies of a Chinese executed by the Japanese on a charge of spying for the Russians seemed to have aroused no emotion among the Chinese onlookers. The realisation came to Lu Hsun that to cure the apathy of the Chinese people was more important than to heal their bodies, and no weapon could be more effective in curing and stirring their minds than literature. Thereupon he gave up his medical studies and turned to literature. It is obvious, however, that he developed in this direction because he was dominated by his desire for a national revolution and by the influence of revolutionary literature as well as the advanced ideas he had received from European science.

Thus the eight years passed by Lu Hsun as a student in Japan laid an important foundation for his later thought and writings. Among the practical activities of the national revolution, Lu Hsun participated in some of the patriotic student movements of the time, and in 1908 became a member of the anti-Manchu revolutionary political association, the *Kuang Fu Hui*. That same year he studied the etymology of Chinese characters under the great Chinese scholar, Chang Tai-yen, because he admired the latter's unbending revolutionary spirit. Thus, during this period, he ended by accepting thorough-going bourgeois democratic revolutionary ideas; at the same time he began to use literature as a means of promoting the revolutionary patriotic cause. Although the literary magazine that he planned to publish in 1907 never saw the light of day, essays, such as the *Power of Poetry,* written that year, together with the translations he made in 1908 from Russian prose writings and those of Eastern and Northern Europe, formed an extremely important, historically significant beginning to his career.

Lu Hsun returned to China in 1909, two years before the Revolution of 1911, and served in such institutions as Hangchow Normal School and Shaohsingfu Middle School as teacher of physiology and chemistry, or as proctor. After the Revolution of 1911, he became principal of Shaohsing Normal School. In 1912, after the establishment of the provisional government of the Chinese Republic, he accepted the invitation of Tsai Yuan-pei, the Minister of Education, to take up a position in his ministry. This post he retained until 1926.

From his return to China to 1918, face to face with Chinese political and social realities, Lu Hsun passed through a period of hard thinking, tortuous mental groping and inner conflict. His mental discomfort arose from the fact that the Revolution of 1911 had not accomplished its historical mission. Disappointed, he became a prey to doubts and began to grope anew for a solution.

The Revolution of 1911 had merely overthrown the Manchu dynasty, while imperialism and feudalism remained unshaken. Political power had fallen into the hands of warlords and political adventurers whom the imperialists utilised to intensify their aggressive activities against China. Thus, with warlords establish-ing independent regimes, ceaseless civil war and imperialist scramble for spheres of influence as its chief features, the semi-feudal, semi-colonial condition of the country became aggravated. In the sphere of thought, a reactionary reversionist movement was also making itself felt and heard. All this proved that the Revolution of 1911 had failed in its historical mission to be an anti-imperialist national revolution and an anti-feudal democratic revolution.

The next factor to be considered is the contradictory state of Lu Hsun's mind at that time. Although he had grasped the revolutionary concept of a thorough-going bourgeois democracy, while rejecting reform measures which compromised with feudalism, yet this was only an ideal to him. He had as yet no clear recognition of how this revolution was to be accomplished, that is, what power to rely upon, or who was to lead it to success. He doubted the revolutionary spirit and power of the masses, especially the peasant masses, and underestimated them. Thus, although Lu Hsun's demand for a revolution was thorough-going, he was at sea regarding the concrete line to be adopted in carrying out the revolution. For, after all, the answer to who was to lead that revolution, and by what power it could be accomplished, came to be clearly recognised only after the Russian October Revolution in 1917 and the May Fourth Movement. For only then did China receive the theoretical guidance of Lenin and Stalin in regard to national and colonial revolutions. And only then did the Chinese proletariat enter the political arena as a class power. If there had been no October Revolution changing the face of world history, no Marxism-Leninism showing us the way and defining the Chinese revolution, in the form of the New-Democratic Revolution, as part of the world revolution of the proletariat, then it would have been difficult for the Chinese revolution to have developed along the correct path. At the time of the Revolution of 1911, the Chinese proletariat had not yet become awakened as an independent class power playing its role in the political arena. The peasants, objectively speaking, should have been the greatest moving force in that revolution. But the leaders of the revolution at that time were unable to recognise the strength of the peasants, nor did they want to recognise it. Considering the peasant masses as "country bumpkins," they wanted merely to use them for their own purposes. The Revolution of 1911 was led by the bourgeoisie of that time. By utilising the peasants and absorbing progressive elements among the intellectuals and patriotic petty bourgeoisie into its ranks, the bourgeoisie was able to overthrow the Manchu dynasty. But the Chinese bourgeoisie then was even weaker than it was at a later period, being composed chiefly of "overseas" business men, officials and landed gentry who had been engaged in big business. Some of them were dependent on the foreign capital that had invaded the country although their interests often clashed with those of imperialism; others were capitalist landlords and bureaucrats who had close and firm ties with feudalism. Thus the inherent weakness of this class made it incapable of engaging in a struggle for the principle of the people's rights or for an anti-imperialist national revolution. On the contrary, it made it incline naturally to a compromise with feudalism and imperialism, its highest political ideal being no more than bourgeois reformism. It followed, therefore, that when this class held the reins of the Revolution of 1911, it did not recognise the real power of the masses against imperialism and feudalism, and especially did not wish to set that force in motion or to organise it. This was the reason why the Revolution of 1911, under such leadership, could only overthrow the Manchu dynasty, but could not fulfill the historical mission of the revolution. But the historical lesson to be derived from the failure of the Revolution of 1911—that the feeble bourgeoisie of China could not lead the Chinese democratic revolution to victory, was not clearly understood until after the May Fourth Movement when the Chinese proletariat stepped into the political arena, when China had her own Communist Party, and when China had come under the influence of the October Revolution and the theories of Lenin and Stalin on national revolutions and colonial revolutions.

Lu Hsun's disappointment in the Revolution of 1911 was actually disappointment in the bourgeoisie. His attitude towards the revolutionary spirit and power of the peasants was one of doubt. The proletariat at that time had not yet grown into a class power. These were the reasons why he could not have any clear recognition of the path of the Chinese revolution and consequently fell into a disturbed state of mind. This was one of his contradictions.

Both before and after the Revolution of 1911, Lu Hsun and intellectuals like him, who had ideas of a thorough-going democratic revolution, found themselves in an impasse even though they were acutely aware of the objective historical need for a democratic revolution and had in various ways taken part in the Revolution of 1911. That is to say, there was a wide gap between their ideals and the realities of the revolution. Lu Hsun's ideal had no great influence upon the revolutionary movement of that time. But already in 1907, he had sharply criticised the political and ideological representatives of the bourgeoisie who led the Revolution of 1911, that is, the revolutionary thinkers and leaders of the time; he had indicated that their proposals were not sufficiently far-reaching, and he had been at special pains to point out that they were inspired by a feudalistic spirit and selfish greed. Lu Hsun's criticisms hit the nail on the head and had exposed the real spirit animating the bourgeoisie and its representatives. He had shown, in 1907, that these so-called revolutionaries were nothing but charlatans. But, in point of fact, there was only this bourgeoisie, these so-called revolutionaries were numerically strong, while revolutionary intellectuals like Lu Hsun were extremely few. From the beginning, Lu Hsun turned towards the masses of the people and took early notice of the peasants; but because of the backwardness of the masses in general he advocated the enlightening of their minds as the first step. Through the liberation of their spirit, that is, their individuality, he would begin to remould the "national character." He believed that only when the people had strong individuality could they rise up in revolution and bring that revolution to victory. (This was an idea derived from the early thinkers of the bourgeois revolution in Europe, and inspired in part by Darwin.) This, according to Lu Hsun, was the path towards revolution; at least it was the duty that he laid upon himself. Of course, the "liberation of individuality" as a means of revolution was confusing the result with the method, and to make it a practical path to revolution was certainly not in accordance with the conditions of Chinese history; but because Lu Hsun had his face turned towards the masses, he believed that the spirit of the Chinese people could and ought to be liberated, and that the work of enlightening them was, after all, one of the duties of a revolutionary. This duty, however, was recognised by very few people and could not obtain the general acclaim of the thinkers of that time. Lu Hsun's proposal and his revolutionary ideal far outstripped the ideas of the bourgeois revolutionaries. Very few among the radical petty-bourgeois intellectuals and real patriots, not to speak of the conservative or charlatan bourgeois revolutionaries actually entertained far-reaching ideals, or turned towards the people, or were ready to undertake the work of enlightening them. This was another of his contradictions. The contradiction between his ideal and the reality made him feel particularly lonely and isolated.

Lu Hsun had welcomed the Revolution of 1911 with enthusiasm and had acknowledged its historical achievement in overthrowing the Manchu dynasty and doing away with certain systems. But, as stated before, he was soon disillusioned, and through his disappointment he was made to feel acutely the wide disparity between his ideas and what had actually happened. And, as stated above, since he had taken part in the Revolution of 1911 with ideas of a thorough-going democratic revolution, and the historical objective need of the time was for a thorough revolution, that is, for an anti-imperialist national revolution and anti-feudalistic democratic revolution, which was not accomplished in 1911, the disparity between Lu Hsun's ideals and the actual revolution also reflected the gap between the historical need for a revolution and the reality of the bourgeoisie-led revolution. It reflected problems which could not be understood or solved by the thinkers of the time. It also reflected contradictions in Lu Hsun's own mind. Neither these contradictions nor the objective problems persisting in this situation were comprehended clearly or solved by Lu Hsun at that time.

Meanwhile his disappointment was intensified and his despondency increased as he saw that, after the Revolution of 1911 among the intellectuals who had entertained revolutionary ideals and had been full of enthusiasm, many became passive, or compromised with the old authorities, or even went over entirely to them and became reactionary members of the reversionist movement.

Thus it came about that Lu Hsun's attitude towards politics in the period from the Revolution of 1911 to 1918 was one of indignant disillusion. Engaged in painful mental groping, he alternated between hope and despair. According to his writings and his own recollections afterwards, the problems that engaged him at this period were those regarding the path of the Chinese revolution (i.e. the moving force of the revolution and its leadership). With this always in mind, he continued to examine silently into society and the thoughts of the people, to study and analyse Chinese history and traditional culture.

The whole of this period was passed by Lu Hsun in Peking, except for two visits to his mother in Shaohsing. What he saw then of the increasing impoverishment of the countryside left a deep impression upon him.

During this period he was earning his own living, supporting his family through his appointment at the Ministry of Education, while at the same time he was engaged in extremely valuable Chinese studies—the textual criticism and compilation of classics, research into the rubbings from old bronzes and stone tablets, etc. His revision of the collected writings of Chi Kang, a great poet of the Wei dynasty, was accomplished at this period. Although living in a feudal era, Chi Kang had dared to oppose tyrannical government and the Confucian dogma of ritual, thus becoming a patriotic poet whose ideas and attitude reflected to a certain degree the spirit of the people.

During this period, Lu Hsun was also engaged in studying the Buddhist classics that had been translated from Indian texts since the Six Dynasties (420—589 A.D.).

His loneliness and mental groping lasted until 1918 when a change began to take place. This was nothing less than the beginning of his brilliant revolutionary struggle.

III

The change in Lu Hsun took place on the eve of the May Fourth Movement which is the line of demarcation running through the Chinese democratic revolutionary movement, dividing the old from the new. Succeeding the Revolution of 1911, a revolutionary upsurge was approaching. Owing to the First World War, the imperialist powers of Europe and America were busily absorbed in doing the fighting and had therefore slackened, for the time being, their oppression and control of China. This allowed the national capitalism of China a certain amount of development, and also resulted in the growth of the proletariat. On the other hand, the October Revolution of 1917 caused a new revolutionary upsurge which, through the participation and under the leadership of revolutionary intellectuals (the chief force coming from the students and young revolutionaries represented by Comrade Mao Tse-tung and others) was moving towards a thoroughly anti-imperialist, anti-feudalistic revolutionary struggle. This struggle came to a head in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The bourgeoisie participated in the May Fourth Movement and showed themselves fairly enthusiastic, for, by that time, they had already changed somewhat in character and developed in number. National capital having met with a chance to raise its head, even if only temporarily and only to a certain degree, the intellectuals representing the capitalist class were quite active in the May Fouth Movement. But the chief characteristic of the May Fourth Movement is that the actual leadership was not in the hands of the bourgeoisie, i.e. the intellectuals representing that class, but in the hands of the revolutionary intellectuals and youths (such as Comrade Li Ta-chao and Comrade Mao Tse-tung) who, representing the worker-peasant masses, had come under the influence of the October Revolution and accepted the theories of Marxism-Leninism. Petty-bourgeois revolutionary intellectuals (Lu Hsun was one of them) showed themselves, at the time, more positive and thorough than the intellectuals who represented the capitalist class. It was only later that some of these petty-bourgeois intellectuals turned to the right and some became passive, while the majority advanced towards Marxism-Leninism. Another characteristic of the May Fourth Movement is that it was far-reaching in its scope. Although the proletariat took no active part in it, their political ideas were reflected objectively in history through the struggle of the Communist intellectuals who were also being drawn into their ranks. Thus, in 1921, the Communist Party of China was founded, when an awakened class entered into the political arena.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said, "The outstanding historical significance of the May Fourth Movement lies in the fact that it possessed a feature not present in the Revolution of 1911, namely, a thorough and uncompromising opposition to imperialism and a thorough and uncompromising opposition to feudalism." (*On New Democracy.*) And with regard to the May Fourth Movement as a movement for the new culture, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said, "The cultural revolution of the May Fourth Movement was a movement thoroughly opposed to feudalistic culture. Since the beginning of Chinese history there has never been such a great and thorough cultural revolution. With 'oppose the old morality and promote the new morality' and 'oppose the old literature and promote the new literature' as its two big banners, it achieved a great success." (*ibid.*) In referring to it as a cultural revolution thoroughly opposed to the then existing feudalistic culture, Comrade Mao Tse-tung indicates that the May Fourth Cultural Movement was also anti-imperialistic.

In April 1918, Lu Hsun, under the pen-name that has become so famous, published in *New Youth* his first short story, *A Madman's Diary*, written in the vernacular. (*New Youth* was a magazine which guided the cultural revolution and the political ideas of democratic revolution. It was also a pioneer in introducing the ideas of the October Revolution and Marxism-Leninism. Li Ta-chao was on the editorial staff and one of its chief leaders.) This story was a fierce attack against the Chinese feudal family system and the old ritualistic Confucian dogma. Both in content and literary form, it was the first bugle call of the cultural revolution which was no other than a revolution in ideology. Directly it was published, it was generally recognised as the first creative work of the new literature of China.

At this time, Lu Hsun also began to write, with an exceedingly sharp and penetrating pen, pithy, militant critical essays aimed at social problems. These were short pieces of political argument permeated with poetic strains, which he himself afterwards called "stray thoughts" and "diverse essays." They were as sharp as a dagger and able also to express thought that was both profound and wide in its scope. Lu Hsun afterwards developed this literary form by completing a whole series of unique prose masterpieces of an ideological and political nature. They occupy the most important place among his literary writings, higher even than his short stories.

From then on, Lu Hsun used his short stories to dissect Chinese society and to reflect situations such as the village becoming bankrupt under the yoke of feudalism. They also reflect Lu Hsun's distress at the memory of the failure of the Revolution of 1911 and hint at the lessons to be derived from it, while his deepest sympathy went to the peasant population that had fallen into distress with no one to whom they could confide their sorrows. At the same time, although he still doubted the revolutionary character and power of the peasant masses, he was nevertheless at pains to discover a revolutionary force among the peasants and entertained fervent hopes of their awakening. In 1923, the publication of his first volume of collected short stories, *Na Han* (*Call to Arms*), which included such immortal works as *My Old Home* and *The True Story of Ah Q*, established Lu Hsun's position in China as the father of the new literature and of realism.

Through their display of constructive power, the creative stories of Lu Hsun laid a basis for victory in the literary revolution. But the chief weapon used by Lu Hsun consisted of those critical essays which he himself called "stray thoughts." He used this weapon against all advocates and practitioners of feudalism, all "reversionists," all backsliders, all who flirted with the enemy, and all who undermined or harmed the revolution—in a word, all enemies of the people and of the revolution. So fierce and effective was this attack that he drove all enemies before him, and wherever he struck inflicted casualties. Also, out of the vastness of his scholarship and his profound knowledge of Chinese history and society, that same history and society and all out-of-date modes of thought were dissected in his prose writings. Through his unique and extraordinarily deep observation and understanding he kept enlightening and warning the youth and revolutionary cultural circles, enabling them not only to penetrate further into the problems before them, but also to learn much from his experience and instruction on the tactics and strategy of the ideological revolution, such as his reiterated: "look reality in the face," "a tough struggle," "no quarter to the enemy," "don't spare him because he's down," etc.

Apart from waging war with his pen, Lu Hsun also kept in close touch with the youth of this period. From 1920, he was a lecturer at the Peking University and the National Teachers College. He edited a supplement to a daily paper, and helped and directed young writers to establish several literary organisations. He spent much time reading the papers of young writers which he revised with great care; and he was visited by many young people and corresponded with many others. In 1925, he gave keen support to the students of the Peking Normal University for Women (where he was concurrently a lecturer) in their opposition to Chang Shih-chao, Minister of Education, who had illegally dissolved the University. In 1926, at the time of Tuan Chi-jui's March 18th massacre of the students, Lu Hsun assisted the students in practical ways, in addition to writing articles to support their cause. Owing to his ideological struggle and the actual guidance and help he gave young people, he was one of the personalities most beloved by them in Peking, during the years 1924 to 1926. Apart from Li Ta-chao, his was the real authority in the ideological sphere.

In August 1926 he was forced to leave Peking by the reactionary warlord government; that was the time when a high tide of revolution was sweeping over South China. And it was also in this year that his second collection of short stories, *Pang Huang* (*Wandering*) was published. 1918-1926 was his first period of brilliant, prolific authorship. The second was from 1927 to his death in 1936, the period during which he was in Shanghai. Prior to leaving Peking, he had written, in addition to his short stories, four volumes of collected essays, one volume of prose poems, a *Short History of the Chinese Novel*, etc. Furthermore, in his translations, larger in bulk than his original writings, he had introduced to the reading public the literary theories of the Soviet Union and Blok's *Twelve*.

Lu Hsun's world outlook, during this period in Peking, was still based on the theory of evolution. According to his own admission, he merely believed that humanity and society are bound to progress, and that the new is bound to replace the old. He struggled, therefore, to hasten the extinction of the old in order to promote the growth of the new; but as to what the new was actually going to be, he would have been at a loss to tell. He had not yet accepted positively and clearly the theories of Marx and Lenin. Regarding the problems of the Chinese democratic revolution, which by this time had already entered the epoch of New Democracy under the leadership of the proletariat, he did not comprehend them, as a Communist would, from the proletarian standpoint, utilising Marxism-Leninism. But he kept moving closer to the Marxist-Leninists, and was fiercely attacking the right wing of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, although still retaining the idea of the liberation of individuality, he had nevertheless, in his work of exposing and attacking the dark forces of society that were oppressing the masses of the people, already far surpassed his former dissection of the roots of illness in the "national character." To be more exact, Lu Hsun had now in a general way diagnosed the feudal structure of Chinese society and the accompanying feudal ideas which, layer upon layer, were oppressing the masses, as being the primary source of disease in the "national character." Lu Hsun had attained to this outlook through prolonged hard thinking before the May Fourth Movement, and enthusiastic participation in the struggle during that movement. This outlook was part of the base which enabled him to advance, step by step, from his former theory of the liberation of individuality (reform of the "national character") to the theory of the liberation of the worker-peasant masses in his later period. Thus, Lu Hsun in his Peking period had not yet acquired the proletarian standpoint and the Marxist-Leninist outlook, but because he was the mortal enemy of feudalism, because all his battles were fights to the finish according to the requirements of the New Democracy, and moreover, because he reflected the determined, uncompromising and fearless spirit of revolution, he finally became an enlightener and spearhead of the New-Democratic revolution.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung, in appraising the May Fourth cultural revolution, has said, "Its influence is so great and its power so tremendous that it is practically invincible wherever it goes. The vast scope of its mobilization is unparalleled in any other period in Chinese history. And Lu Hsun was the greatest and the most militant standard-bearer of this new cultural force. He was the supreme commander in China's cultural revolution, he was not only a great man of letters, but also a great thinker and a great revolutionary. Lu Hsun had the stiffest backbone, and there was in him not the slightest trace of obsequiousness and sycophancy; this is the character to be most treasured among the colonial and semi-colonial people. Lu Hsun, representing the great majority of the people, was an unprecedented national hero on the cultural front, the most correct, the bravest, the firmest, the most loyal and the most zealous hero who stormed and broke up the enemy's front. Lu Hsun's direction is precisely the direction of the new culture of the Chinese nation." (*On New Democracy.*) Of course, Comrade Mao Tse-tung here had in mind particularly Lu Hsun's later period of ten years' arduous struggle in Shanghai.

IV

In August 1926, Lu Hsun left Peking for Amoy where he accepted the professorship of literature at

Amoy University; he resigned, however, in December of that year. In January 1927, he went to Canton where he became Dean and concurrently Head of the Chinese Language and Literature Department of Sun Yat-sen University. In April of that year, when Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution and arrested and murdered members of the Communist Party and the masses of the revolution on a large scale, some of the students of Sun Yat-sen University were also seized and executed. When Lu Hsun's efforts on their behalf failed, he resigned in anger. After his resignation, Lu Hsun himself was in danger in Canton; therefore, in October, he left for Shanghai. From this time on he resided in Shanghai until his death; neither did he resume teaching nor adopt any other profession, devoting all his energies to literary work and the literary movement. Thus began the great and heroic struggle of his later period.

In 1928, he founded the magazine *Pen-liu* (*The Torrent*) and began to study the social science of Marxism-Leninism, translating the literary theories of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, he began to draw close to the Communist Party, taking part in the mass movements promoted by it. For instance, in 1928 he became a member of the Revolutionary Mutual Aid Society; in 1930, he was one of the promoters of the China Freedom League. When the China League of Left-Wing Writers was founded in Shanghai in March 1930, a historic event in the Chinese revolutionary literary movement, Lu Hsun was one of its founders and its chief leader until it was reorganised, in 1936, owing to changed conditions. Further, in January 1933, he joined the China League for Civil Rights; and in May, he went to the German Consulate in Shanghai and personally handed in a protest against the brutalities of the Nazis. In September, the French comrade, Vaillant-Couturier, and a few others came to Shanghai for the purpose of attending an anti-imperialist, anti-fascist conference, which, owing to the White Terror, had to be held in the strictest secrecy. Madame Sun Yat-sen attended this conference as delegate for China. Although Lu Hsun was not present at the meeting, he had helped with the organisation of the conference and was one of the honorary chairmen. These were the most prominent political struggles in which he took part in addition to his literary struggle.

During these last ten years of his life, Lu Hsun's literary output also surpassed that of his former period. He wrote nine volumes of prose no less stringent than that of his first period, while far surpassing his first period in mental depth and breadth and in literary style. He also completed a volume of short stories on historical subjects, and his translations were far greater in bulk than in his first period. The most important of these were: *The Theory of Art* by Plekhanov and *The Theory of Art, Literature and Criticism* by Lunacharsky; Fadeyev's novel, *The Nineteen; October* by H. Yakovlev; two volumes of short stories by Furmanov and others; Gorky's *Russian Fairy Tales,* and Gogol's *Dead Souls.* He also introduced to the Chinese reading public Serafimovitch's *Iron Stream,* Gladkov's *Cement,* Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don,* and Ivanov's *Armoured Train.*

It was also during these ten years that Lu Hsun introduced Soviet woodcuts to the Chinese public, and those of the German artist, Käthe Kollwitz, while he promoted and directed the new Chinese revolutionary woodcut movement.

A third of Lu Hsun's time, during these ten years, was taken up with directing, and taking part in, the editorial work of various magazines, in reading, revising and correcting the manuscripts written by young people and in keeping up correspondence with them, all of which activities far outnumbered those of his first period. He hardly had any time to rest. For instance, even during his last illness in 1936, he still exerted himself to read the manuscripts of young writers and write prefaces for them; he also meticulously edited, revised, and published posthumously the writings and translations of Comrade Chü Chiu-pai.

These ten years, moreover, were the years of the bloody rule of the insane White Terror, with the Kuomintang trying to "surround and exterminate" the revolutionaries. Lu Hsun's social relations were limited to a few young people and one or two Communists whom he met in complete or partial secrecy, under extreme difficulty. He was obliged to live apart from the masses and was in hourly danger of arrest or assassination. Nevertheless, he persisted in his unbending and unrelenting struggle and in his leadership of the cultural movement. Not only did he support the revolutionary cultural front, never yielding a single step, but he broke up the ten-year Kuomintang "surround and exterminate" campaign against the revolutionary cultural movement. As Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said, "It was during this 'surround and exterminate' campaign that Lu Hsun, an advocate of Communism, became a giant of the Chinese cultural revolution."

The last articles to come from Lu Hsun's pen were published during his illness in July and August, 1936 and consisted of an open letter exposing the schemes of the Chinese Trotskyites to undermine the Chinese Communist policy of a national united front against Japan, and an article accepting and advocating the policy of the Chinese Communist Party.

Owing to overwork and the ravages of tuberculosis, Lu Hsun, this "giant of the cultural revolution," died on October 19, 1936 in Shanghai.

Lu Hsun's contribution to the people during the last ten years of his life was in truth as great as evaluated by Chairman Mao. The key to his success was the firmness of his faith. From the time he recognised the revolutionary force of the worker and peasant classes and stood firmly with the proletariat, accepting the whole truth of Marxism-Leninism, he never doubted the inevitable victory of the Chinese revolution. In his struggle for the Chinese people's revolution, for the Communist ideals of humanity, he spent all his strength, withholding nothing, never idle for a single day.

His struggle and thought developed all through his life alongside of the Chinese revolution, enabling him to fulfill the historical mission he had undertaken—that of revolutionary enlightenment. He was without doubt a great and brilliant thinker in the field of revolutionary enlightenment. Especially during the last ten years of his life, using the ideological weapon of Marxism-Leninism, he took upon himself the duties of a rank-and-file soldier of the worker-peasant masses, sweeping away the obstacles blocking the progress of the revolutionary ideology and culture of the worker-peasant masses. Thus, his courageous attitude and the power of his thought far surpassed those of his first period.

The fighting character of Lu Hsun's thought and its permanent historical value are due to the fact that his ideas were focused from beginning to end on the progressive demands of the Chinese people and on the path of the revolution. They were due to his groping and developing in the direction of the victory of the people's revolution and to his union in blood with the people on the hard, tortuous and victorious path of revolution. The development of Lu Hsun's ideas throughout his life, and the final conclusion to which it led, serves well to demonstrate the inevitable victory of the Chinese people's revolution, of Marxism-Leninism in China, and above all, of Mao Tse-tung's teachings.

Lu Hsun in the period when he based his ideas on the theory of evolution was a progressive materialist. The basis and value of his materialist thought lay in its reflecting the revolutionary reality of the time and in its progressive quality being put to the service of revolutionary reality in the struggle for the progress of the people. But the leap from the theory of evolution to Marxism, from the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie to the proletariat, from ordinary progressive materialism to revolutionary historical dialectic materialism meant an essential development in Lu Hsun's thought. Only historical dialectic materialism is fully revolutionary. It alone is able to give an absolutely undistorted reflection of revolutionary reality, and it alone is completely effective in the service of revolution. Therefore, it was this essential development that enabled Lu Hsun to accomplish his great fighting mission, that gave permanent historical value to his ideas and made him a "giant of the cultural revolution."

Because Lu Hsun's ideas never deviated from the actual struggle of the revolution—he always thought in terms of actual struggles—his ideology not only reflected the way in which the Chinese revolution developed, but was also rich in the fighting experiences and lessons learned from the revolutionary reality. Lu Hsun himself was one who was able to accept the lessons to be learned from the blood sacrifice of the people. For instance, his becoming a Marxist-Leninist in his later period, a supremely active warrior fighting under the banner of the Chinese Communist Party, was the result of his accepting the lessons learned from actual events. Thus, his development into a Marxist-Leninist was not only a reflection of the historical significance of the betrayal of revolution by the Kuomintang in 1927 and the historical truth that only under the leadership of the proletariat and the Communist Party could the Chinese revolution be victorious, it was also closely linked with the actual revolutionary struggle. This union enriched the content and the realistic quality of his thought. The experiences and lessons that he noted down therefore have had, over a long period, realistic significance and value.

Since his link with the revolution was so close, his thought also reflected the great ideals of the Chinese people and the greatness and excellence of their mass and folk culture. In addition to this, the brilliance of Marxism-Leninism filled his thought with clear and luminous ideals. Because his thought richly reflected the ideas, wisdom and qualities of the Chinese people and the essence of Chinese culture, and was a crystallisation of the revolutionary will and struggle of the Chinese people, his works will undoubtedly become classics reflecting the fighting spirit of the Chinese people and their ideals in life.

He gave everything to the struggle for Chinese culture and for the Chinese people's victorious future of Communism after the transitional stage of New Democracy. He worked for Mao Tse-tung's cause, and he died at his post; he was indeed a true patriot. At the same time, he was a faithful friend of the socialist Soviet Union and of all the progressive people of the world, a true internationalist.

His literary works, such as his short stories, do not amount to much in bulk, but their quality has enabled them to lay a firm foundation for Chinese realism and has made Lu Hsun one of the world's great realists in the twentieth century. Lu Hsun's realism is a realism peculiar to the Chinese people. If, however, it is compared with the literature of other countries, it comes closest to Russian realism. This is because there were certain similarities between Chinese society in Lu Hsun's day and Russian society before the October Revolution, and also, according to Lu Hsun's own statement, because he had come under the influence of the literature of Russia and that of Eastern and Northern Europe.

The political writings in which Lu Hsun attacks his enemies and expresses his own ideas, that is, his "diverse essays," are more important, both in regard to his own development and for the Chinese people, than his short stories. The sixteen volumes of his collected articles form the chief record of his thought and, at the same time, are his major weapon for attacking his enemies. In them we find his deep hatred and blazing anger against the enemies of the people; in them are the hopes of the people and the splendour of their victory. They are an inexhaustible store of valuable and profound ideas on Chinese history, Chinese society and the Chinese revolution, and may be regarded as a treasure-house of the wisdom of the Chinese people today. The artistic quality and style of his works place Lu Hsun in the ranks of the few great prose writers of the world.

In his writings on the history of literature, Lu Hsun gave proof of broad scholarship and original views. Besides this, he was indefatigable in introducing foreign literature to the Chinese public, especially Russian and Soviet literature, with the result that his translations are greater in volume than his original writings.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lu Hsun, pseudonym of Chou Shu-jen, is the father of modern Chinese literature, and the greatest standard-bearer of the Chinese cultural revolution. He was born in Shaohsing, Chekiang Province, in 1881 and died in Shanghai in 1936. As early as 1918, the year before the May Fourth Movement, he published his story *A Madman's Diary,* calling on the Chinese people to rise and give battle to feudalism. Thereafter Lu Hsun identified his work with the Chinese people's revolution for which he waged a relentless struggle until his death. In his later years (after 1927) he was closer than ever to the Chinese Communist Party, and became a fearless fighter and great thinker of the proletariat.

A prolific writer, he wrote three volumes of short stories: *Call to Arms, Wandering* and *Old Tales Retold,* and sixteen volumes of essays including *Hot Air* and *The Grave.* Among his translations are Fadeyev's *The Nineteen,* Gogol's *Dead Souls* and Panteleev's *The Watch.* Lu Hsun also edited works of ancient Chinese literature, and wrote an outline history of the Chinese novel.